(Version c.)

(Communicated by Mr. Lee C. Wooddell, Durbin, Pocahontas County, who obtained it from Mr. Ernie Wright, Hosterman, Pocahontas County.)

1. John Hardy he was two years old,
   Sitting on his mother's knee:
   "The Big Ben Tunnel on the C. & O. Road
   Is going to be the death of me, poor boy,
   Is going to be the death of me, poor boy."

2. John Hardy went into a Wild West show,
   Playing at a fifty-cent game:
   "Whoever wins my fifty cents,
   I'm going to blow out his brains, poor boy!
   I'm going to blow out his brains, poor boy."

3. John Hardy laid down a twenty-dollar bill,
   And he didn't ask for change:
   "All I want is a forty-four gun
   To blow out another nigger's brains, poor boy!
   To blow out another nigger's brains, poor boy!"

4. John Hardy went to New Port,
   Expecting to be free.
   The detective patted him on the back:
   "John Hardy, go along with me, poor boy!
   John Hardy, go along with me, poor boy!"

5. "I've been to the East, I've been to the West,
   And I've been all over the world;
   I've been to the river to be baptized,
   But I'm on my hanging-ground, poor boy!
   But I'm on my hanging-ground, poor boy!"

6. John Hardy had a pretty little wife,
   He kept her dressed in blue.
   When she heard that John was dead,
   "John Hardy, I've been true to you, poor boy!
   John Hardy, I've been true to you, poor boy!"

THE JOHN HENRY HAMMER SONG

A

Mrs. Sidney Wilson, Minnehaha Springs, W. Va. Mrs. Wilson obtained this version from her brother, a man well acquainted with construction camps in the South.

This old hammer, - - huh,
Killed John Henry, - - huh;
This old hammer, - - huh,
Killed John Henry, - - huh;
This old hammer, - - huh,
Killed John Henry, - - huh;
Killed him dead, - - huh.

Ain't no hammer, - - huh,
In these mountains, - - huh;
Ain't no hammer, - - huh,
In these mountains, - - huh;
Ain't no hammer, - - huh,
In these mountains, - - huh;
Rings like mine, - - huh.

Take this hammer, - - huh,
And give it to the walker, - - huh;
Take this hammer, - - huh,
And give it to the walker, - - huh;
Take this hammer, - - huh,
And give it to the walker, - - huh;
For I'm goin' home, - - huh.

I told Hattie, - - huh,
To whip - a those children, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To whip - a those children, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To whip - a those children, - - huh;
Make 'em mind, - - huh.

'Cause the penitentiary, - - huh,
Is full o' people, - - huh;
'Cause the penitentiary, - - huh,
Is full o' people, - - huh;
'Cause the penitentiary, - - huh,
Is full o' people, - - huh;
Won't raised right, - - huh.

98

I told Hattie, - - huh,
To make her dress a little longer, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To make her dress a little longer, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To make her dress a little longer, - - huh;
A - showin' of her laig, - - huh.

B

Newton Redwine. Mr. Redwine says: "John Henry had no regular song to sing as he worked, but it seems that the following was his favorite just before his death." The Beattyville Enterprise, Beattyville, Ky., Feb. 1, 1929.

I have hammered
Four long years
With this old hammer

I have hammered
On the W & A
I have hammered
On the old M & C
I have worked
On the C & S

The hammer am a ringin'
And the steel am a singin'
I'll put the hole
On down boys
Put the hole on down

This old hammer
Killed John Scott
It will never kill me

Hammer am a ringin'
Steel am a singin'
I'll put the hole
On down boys
I'll put the hole
On down - hut - hut - hut

Hut - hut - hut
I'll put the hole on down
I'll put the hole on down

This old hammer
Has killed John Scott
It will never kill me
Hut - hut - hut

I'll put the hole on down, boys
I'll put the hole on down

HARDY, John. The popular song "John Hardy" without doubt had its origin and development in West Virginia. The hero of this modern ballad was a Negro, whose prowess and fame are sung far and wide among his own race, and to a less extent among white folk. No written or printed statements concerning him are known to exist except an order in the courthouse at Welch, McDowell County, W. Va., for his execution. However, the statements hereinafter given are believed to be thoroughly reliable.

In a letter dated Charleston, W. Va., Feb. 16, 1916, addressed to Dr. H. S. Green of that city, and written by the Hon. W. A. McCorkle, governor of West Virginia from 1893 to 1897, occurs the following: —

"He [John Hardy] was a steel-driver, and was famous in the beginning of the building of the C. & O. Railroad. He was also a steel-driver in the beginning of the extension of the N. & W. Railroad. It was about 1872 that he was in this section. This was before the day of steam-drills; and the drill-work was done by two powerful men, who were special steel-drillers. They struck the steel from each side; and as they struck the steel, they sang a song which they improvised as they worked. John Hardy was the most famous steel-driller ever in southern West Virginia. He was a magnificent specimen of the genus *Homo*, was reported to be six feet two, and weighed two hundred and twenty five or thirty pounds, was straight as an arrow, and was one of the most handsome men in the country, and, as one informant told me, was as 'black as a kittle in hell.'

"'Whenever there was any spectacular performance along the lines of drilling, John Hardy was put on the job; and it is said that he could drill more steel than any two men of his day. He was a great gambler, and was

John Hardy Vs. John Henry

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notorious all through the country for his luck in gambling. To the dusky sex all through the country, he was the 'greatest ever,' and he was admired and beloved by all the Negro women from the southern West Virginia line to the C. & O. In addition to this, he could drink more whiskey, sit up all night and drive steel all day, to a greater extent than any man ever known in the country.

"The killing in which he made his final exit was a 'mixtery' between women, cards, and liquor; and it was understood that it was more of a fight than a murder. I have been unable to find out where he was hung, but have an idea that it was down in the southwest part, near Virginia; but I am not positive about this. In other words, his story is a story of one of the composite characters that so often arise in the land, – a man of kind heart, very strong, pleasant in his address, yet a gambler, a roue, a drunkard, and a fierce fighter.

"The song is quite famous in the construction-camps; and when they are driving steel in a large camp, the prowess of John Hardy is always sung. I enclose you some verses which are in addition to the ones you sent me. Of course, you understand that all this about John Hardy is merely among the Negroes. I cannot say that the John Hardy that you mention was hung is the same John Hardy of the song; but it may be so, for he was supposed to be in that vicinity when he last exploited himself. He was never an employee of the C. & O. He was an employee of the Virginia contractors, C. R. Mason & Co., and the Langhorn Company."

Mr. Ernest I. Kyle, a former student of West Virginia University, whose home is at Welch, and whom I asked to look up the records of the trial and also to report such other data as he could secure, in a letter dated Sept. 14, 1917, writes as

another Negro over a crap game at Shawnee Camp. This place is now known as Eckman, W. Va. (the name of the P.O.). The Shawnee Coal Company was and is located there. Hardy was tried and convicted in the July term of the McDowell County Criminal Court, and was hanged near the courthouse on Jan. 19, 1894. While in jail, he composed a song entitled 'John Hardy,' and sung it on the scaffold before the execution. He was baptized the day before the execution. The last information I got from W. T. Tabor, who was deputy clerk of the Criminal Court at the time of the trial, and is now engaged in civil engineering. There is no record of the trial of John Hardy in the courthouse. Mr. Tabor informs me that there is no record of the trial in existence. The only thing I could find at the courthouse was the order for John Hardy's execution."

The order is as follows: —

State of W. Va.

vs.

John Hardy.

Felony.

This day came again the State by her attorney and the Prisoner who stands convicted

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the trial in existence. The only thing I could find at the courthouse was the order for John Hardy's execution."

The order is as follows: –

State of W. Va.

vs.

John Hardy.

Felony.

This day came again the State by her attorney and the Prisoner who stands convicted of murder in the first degree was again brought to the bar of the Court in custody of the Sheriff of this County; and thereupon the Prisoner being asked by the Court if anything he had or could say why the Court should not proceed to pass the sentence of the law upon him in accordance with the verdict of the jury impanelled in this cause, and the Prisoner saying nothing why such sentence should not be passed upon him by the Court; It is therefore considered by the Court that the Prisoner John Hardy, is guilty as found by the verdict of the jury herein and that the said John Hardy be hanged by the neck until he is dead, and that the Sheriff of the County, on Friday the 19th day of January 1894, take the said John Hardy from the jail of the County to some suitable place to be selected by him in this County and there hang the said John Hardy by the neck until he is dead, and the prisoner is remanded to jail.

The following statement was given by Mr. W. T. Tabor to Mr.

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Me and some on

"John Hardy: Negro, about forty years of age; black in color; from Virginia; worked as miner in coal-fields; had no family as known; killed another Negro in a crap game over 75 cents; another Negro named Guggins helped him escape and tried to wrest gun from sheriff to shoot, but both men were captured and returned to Welch. Guggins was given a life term for attempt to kill sheriff.

"Hardy hung in '94 in present courthouse yard, though not such at the time. At time of execution some white man in the crowd started a panic by yelling, 'O Lordy! O Lordy!' Officers had to jail some twenty-five or thirty men before execution could safely be concluded. Hardy lies buried in Woodmont addition to town of Welch."

The statement of R. L. Johnson, constable, who helped arrest Hardy, as compiled by Mr. Charles V. Price, shorthand reporter at Welch, W. Va., from a conversation between Johnson and Judge Herndon, was sent to me in the early part of the year 1917. It follows: –

"I was at Keystone the morning that Hardy killed this fellow, but I couldn't tell you the fellow's name now. They were shooting craps at Shawnee camp, and he was crap-shooting, and Webb Gudgin was behind a rock with a Winchester, and it is supposed that if Hardy didn't get the man that he was there with a Winchester to get him. After he was killed they sent to Keystone, and me and Tom Campbell went down there to search the camps; and while we were searching the camps they said, 'Yonder they go, down the road!' and we got on the railroad and followed them to the old bridge below Shawnee, and they turned up the hollow, and I says, 'We will follow them up there.' Tom says, 'No, we can't follow them in the woods; they have got a Winchester, as good a gun as we have got.' So we went back and decided to watch the trains. Me and some one, I think it was

Harvey Dillon, was watching Northfork station. They got on the train at Grover, and they got them; and when they went to handcuff Hardy, Gudgin was walking through the coaches. and every one went out to get Gudgin, and he made to jerk John off the train; but John held to him till they got the train stopped, and they sent a colored fellow back there to help him, and they put him on the train and brought him back to Keystone. George Dillon and I took charge of him. John wasn't able to stay up. We took charge of them and guarded them that night, and they come and threatened to lynch him, and we said they couldn't come up there, and Webb said if we would unhandcuff him and give him his gun nobody would come up there. We had him over Belcher's store.

"I believe I come down the next morning and put them in jail. I never knew anything more about the case until the trial. I was down here during the trial. After he was found guilty he wanted to be baptized. We took him down there to the river, and I was along with him when they baptized him. I forget what preacher baptized him. He had on a new suit of clothes, hat and everything, but he didn't like the looks of his shoes at all. I took them back and swapped them; and when he put them on and viewed himself he had on the best suit he ever had, the way I looked at it. He was about six feet two, I think, or maybe he might have been six foot three."

JUDGE HERNDON. Give his color, before you start on Gudgin.

MR. JOHNSON. He was black.

JUDGE HERNDON. About what age?

MR. JOHNSON. Well, I couldn't hardly tell you. I would figure him about thirty.

JUDGE HERNDON. Now give a description of Gudgin.

MR. JOHNSON. Well, Gudgin, I believe, was a little taller than I am, I believe about six feet, heavily built. He wasn't so fleshy, but he was heavy built, yellow.

JUDGE HERNDON. Were you deputy sheriff at the time?

MR. JOHNSON. I was constable.

JUDGE HERNDON. Campbell was deputy sheriff?

MR. JOHNSON. Yes.

JUDGE HERNDON. And John Effler was the sheriff of McDowell County at that time?

MR. JOHNSON. Yes, sir.

JUDGE HERNDON. In the town of Welch now do you know about the spot where the scaffold was built?

MR. JOHNSON. Why, I could get out here and look it up, but it was right out here somewhere.

MR. DAVID COLLINS. It was right back of the old temporary jail.

JUDGE HERNDON. You say you don't remember the name of the man John Hardy killed?

MR. JOHNSON. No, I don't remember him.

JUDGE HERNDON. But do you remember what they killed him for?

MR. JOHNSON. They were shooting craps. It is my understanding they had had the crap game before, and this fellow had skinned Hardy, and he went back started the crap game to get to kill him. That was the statement at the time.

JUDGE HERNDON. In other words, this colored man that Hardy killed had skinned Hardy in the game before that game?

MR. JOHNSON. Yes, sir, and Hardy goes down and starts a crap game, and Webb was behind this rock with his Winchester so if Hardy failed he would get him. That was the statement, what they claimed when they came after us, when we went down there.

JUDGE HERNDON. Where was he from?

MR. JOHNSON. I don't know. I might have heard, but I never paid any attention. We were out nearly all night that night. I recollect it well. I think it was about the first year John Effler was elected sheriff. My recollection is that the time Hardy killed the other colored man was along some time during the first of the year, in 1893, and that he was tried along about April or May, 1893, and hanged soon after his conviction, about sixty days.

Mr. A. C. Payne, English, W. Va., in a letter dated Oct. 16, 1917, writes me as follows: —

"Just received your letter requesting information of a Negro named John Hardy. I was one of the

miner about 6 feet high and about 25 years old, as well as I could guess at him. He killed a Negro boy about 19 years old. And he was a very black Negro. That is about all I know about him."

The above-quoted statements seem to establish two groups of facts: –

1. *(a)* That about the year 1872 there was a certain John Hardy employed as a steel-driller in railroad-construction in the southern part of West Virginia. This man was a very black Negro, six feet tall, or more, of splendid physique, a drinker, a gambler, a roue, and a fierce fighter.

(b) That later this Negro killed a man in an altercation of some sort in which gambling played a part.

(c) That the murder and execution took place in the southern part of the State, near the Virginia line.

2. *(a)* That in the year 1893 a certain John Hardy was employed as a coal-miner in the extreme southern part of West Virginia. This man was a very black Negro, six feet two or three inches tall, and a gambler.

(b) That this John Hardy killed a man over a crap game for the sum of seventy-five cents.

(c) That the murder and execution took place in the southern part of the State, near the Virginia line.

The identity of these two men is not established, but the inference that they are the same is extremely probable. That two men of the same name and race, so nearly alike in physique, habits, and characteristics, should meet the same fate, for the same crime, in the same locality, is hardly believable.

The consideration of the age of the Hardy of 1893 is important in determining whether he and the Hardy of 1872 are identical. The prowess of the steel-driller of 1872 indicates a man of mature age, let us say twenty-four or twenty-five. In 1893 he would then have been forty-five or forty-six. Three of the men connected with the trial of Hardy have given estimates of his age as follows: Tabor, assistant clerk of the Criminal Court, forty; Johnson, constable, thirty; Payne, juryman, twenty-five. The value of these estimates depends upon two things, – first, accuracy of memory in recalling, after a lapse of twenty-four years, such details of feature as would enable one to judge of age; and, second, the ability of the witness to make such a judgment. Mr. Johnson says, "I couldn't hardly tell you about what age. I would figure him about thirty." The statement itself indicates much uncertainity about the matter. Mr. Payne says, "About twenty-five years old, as well as I could guess at him." Evidently at the trial Hardy's age was not brought out, or at least not emphasized enough to be remembered, and a guess by memory after twenty-four years may not be worth much. Mr. Tabor says, "About forty years of age." Mr. Tabor was deputy clerk of the court that tried Hardy, and is now engaged in civil engineering. His statements indicate a better-trained and more accurate type of mind than the others, and have a directness that is assuring. In any case, the judgment of the age of a Negro of the splendid physical type of Hardy is a difficult matter, hard to come at within ten years, and more likely to be underestimated than overestimated. In my judgment, the testimony may well point to an age considerable in excess of forty.

Mr. H. S. Walker, a man of mature years, a student in West Virginia University from Fayette

County, through which the C. & O. runs, reports the following as a current belief where he lives: –

John Hardy, a Negro, worked for Langhorn, a railroad -contractor from Richmond, Va., at the time of the building of the C. & O. Road. Langhorn had a contract for work on the east side of the Big Bend Tunnel, which is in the adjoining county of Summers, to the east of Fayette County; and some other contractor had the work on the west side of the tunnel. This was the time when the steam-driller was first used. Langhorn did not have one, but the contractor on the other side of the tunnel did; and Langhorn made a wager with him that Hardy could, by hand, drill a hole in less time than the steam-drill could. In the contest that followed, Hardy won, but dropped dead on the spot. He tells me, also, that there is a current report in this part of the State concerning a John Hardy who was a tough, a saloon frequenter, an outlaw, and a sort of a thug. He thinks this John Hardy was a white man, and he is sure that he was hanged later on for killing a man in McDowell County or across the line in Virginia.

Probability indicates that these two stories are about the same man. For a white man contemporary with the steel-driller to possess the same name and attributes as he, to operate in the early part of his career in the same region, to drift later to the same locality, to commit the same crime, and to pay the same penalty, is not believable.

There remains the belief that John Hardy died from the effects of the drilling-contest. In answer to inquiries concerning this, Ex-Gov. McCorkle writes, "You are mistaken when you say John Hardy died from the drilling-contest." In support of the belief, however, there is a ballad called "The Steel Driver," not as yet found in West Virginia, but reported by Shearin in his *Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Songs*, p. 19, as follows: –

"THE STEEL DRIVER, ii, 1a3b4c3b, II: John Henry, proud of his skill with sledge and hand-drill, competes with a modern steam-drill in Tunnel No. Nine, on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad. Defeated, he dies, asking to be buried with his tools at his breast."

The change of name to John Henry, and the victory into a defeat, is not significant, and is easily accounted for by oral transmission. The same process of reasoning as applied heretofore identifies John Henry with John Hardy, who could not have died at the end of a drilling-contest. Most likely the ballad celebrating the prowess of John Hardy gradually, in its earlier making, enhanced that prowess, and, by the natural tendency to a tragic ending, finally sang of his defeat and death.

Whether the drilling-contest be fact or fiction, is not important. However, it could hardly have happened. A note addressed to the Ingersoll-Rand Company, to whom I was referred as authority on drills, brings the following statemtent in a letter dated New York City, Dec. 19, 1917: –

"Your letter of Dec. 4, addressed to the Company at Easton, Pa., has been referred to us, and in reply we would advise you that, although we have no definite records, it is rather improbable that steam rock-drills were used in the building of the C. & O. Railroad. As you will see from the text of the attached advertisement, machine-drills were first used about 1866; but their use was very limited, and not at all general."

The portion of the advertisement above referred to,

that is significant for this discussion, is as follows: –

"The first time rock-drills were used in big work was at the Hoosac Tunnel, year 1866. Here the Burleigh drill failed because of great repair costs. Next came the Musconetong Tunnel, Lehigh Valley R. R., driven from end to end with the Ingersoll drill, which had been brought to a practical stage in rock-work on Fourth Avenue, New York, for the horse-car tunnel. This covers the period up to 1875, when the Rand Little Giant made a step in advance."

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was completed westward from Sulphur Springs to Huntington – that is, entirely across the State of West Virginia – in 1873.

Two versions of the ballad, with a total of five variants, have come to hand. Version *a* gives us something with the very atmosphere of the construction-camp, its rough gang of illiterate Negroes, its profanity, and its glorification of a gambler, a drunkard, and a murderer. With the exception of stanzas 2 and 3, the ballad deals with the episode of the hanging, in some way not clearly stated, and connected with gambling. The name of the place, Shawnee Camp, is exactly correct; but the number of men killed is increased to two, and the murderer is caught because he refused to run. Not only does the bulk of the ballad deal with this incident in the career of John Hardy, but the prominent places, the beginning and the end, are given to it. The older incident of the steel-drilling contest is, however, clearly remembered and vigorously expressed, though evidently on the way to forgetfulness. This version stands half way, as it were, between the "Steel Driller" listed by Shearin and version *b*.

In version *b* the steel-driller has dropped out of memory entirely. Shawnee Camp has become a Chinese camp, – an easy change, – and consequently the man killed is a Chinaman. The yellow girl with her money is still in the game, and a man is killed in a gambling-brawl. The reference to the Big Bend Tunnel is probably a cross-reference from another West Virginia ballad (namely, "The Wreck on the C. & O. Road") very popular in the southern part of the State, and contemporary in growth with that part of "John Hardy" since 1894. The last two stanzas, given to John Hardy himself, furnish an interesting reference to a fact in his history (namely, his baptism before hanging), and may be a remnant of the song he composed and sang just before his death. The introduction of the conventional ballad element of having the hero's mother and sweetheart come to see him is to be noted in stanzas 6 and 7.

Versions *c*, *d*, and *e* are variants of version *b*. In *c* the Negro gambling-dive is exalted to a "Wild West show" (stanza 2), and the conventionalizing process is carried further in stanza 6 by giving him a "pretty little wife," whom he kept "dressed in blue," and who had always been true to him. In *d* the yellow girl becomes a less shadowy personage, upon whom is bestowed the high-sounding, romantic name, Rozella (stanza 2). The refusal of the Court to grant bond to a "murderen" man in stanza 6 is a good bit of realism, with which, no doubt, the Negro singers of this ballad were fairly familiar. The reference to his baptism fails to appear. In *e* the conventionalizing process goes on apace: the father is introduced, the hero is blessed with three children, and two stanzas (7 and 8) from *The Lass of Roch Royal* (Child, No. 76) are inserted.

As a result of this study, the following things appeal to me as significant: –

1. The origin in our day of such a ballad among an illiterate and comparatively primitive people.

2. The testimony of spontaneous composition of stanzas by men engaged in the hard work of steel-drilling.

3. The two groups of facts in Hardy's life centring respectively about the dates 1872 and 1894, which furnish the nuclei for three types of ballad as to content: *(a)* John Hardy, the steel-driver; *(b)* John Hardy, the steel-driver and the murdered; *(c)* John Hardy, the murderer.

4. The unreliability of statements in the ballad; and the difficulty, even at this early date, of determining the facts on which the song is based.

5. The passing of the song into the possession of white folk, and the rapid introduction on conventional elements of balladry. All the copies of the ballad in my possession were communicated by white people.

"John Hardy" is recorded elsewhere as follows: –

SHEARIN AND COMBS, A Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Song, p. 19. "John Hardy," iii, 4a3b4c3b, 6. – An account of Hardy's shooting a man in a poker-game; of his arrest, trial, conviction, conversion, and baptism; and of his execution and burial on the Tug River.

– *Ibid.*, "The Steel Driver," ii, 4a3b4c3b, II. – John Henry, proud of his skill with sledge and hand-drill, competes with a modern steam-drill in Tunnel No. Nine, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. Defeated, he dies, asking to be buried with his tools at his breast.

JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLK-LORE, 22:247. – A North Carolina version of four stanzas contributed by Miss Louise Rand Bascom, in which John Hardy shot a man in New Orlean Town, as he is made to say, "for the sake of her I love." The fact of his baptism is mentioned.

Ibid., 22:249-250. – Louise Rand Bascom reports from North Carolina "Johnie Henry," which she says begins, –

"Johnie Henry was a hard workin' man,
He died with his hammer in his hand."

Ibid., 26:163-165. – Five variants of "John Henry" reported by E. C. Sparrow. The first four are brief, and the only significant lines are, –

"This ole hammer killed John Henry,
Drivin' Steel, Baby, drivin' steel."

The fifth is a ballad of eight stanzas, obtained from Kentucky mountain whites. In it John Henry is a steel-driver, who competes with a steam-driller in a big tunnel, apparently on the C. & O. line. He leaves a faithful wife to mourn his death.

Ibid., 26:180-182. – Variant *e* of this study, communicated by the present writer; also printed in West Virginia School Journal and Educator, 44:216-217 (September, 1915).

Ibid., 27:249. – Reported by title, "That's the Hammer killed John Henry," from South Carolina, by Henry C. Davis.

Ibid., 28:14. – Communicated by John A. Lomax as being sung along the Chesapeake and Ohio Road in Kentucky and West Virginia. John Henry, the best steel-driver on the C. & O. Road, competes with a steam-driller in Tunnel No. Nine, beats it by an inch and a half, and lays down his hammer and dies.

CAMPBELL AND SHARP, English Folk-Songs from the Southern Appalachians, pp. 257-258: "John Hardy." – A ballad in nine stanzas. Nothing is said of steel-driving, and the hero kills his partner for fifty cents in the "Shunny Camps" (Shawnee Camp). Hardy is evidently thought of as a white man, for the murder is done "for the sake of my blue-eyed girl." The fact of his baptism is mentioned, and two stanzas from "The Lass of Roch Royal" are inserted, the same stanzas as in variant *e* of the present study.

THE BEREA QUARTERLY (Berea, Ky.), 14 (October, 1910): 26 (N. 3). – Two stanzas only: –

"John Hardy had a wife, a child,
A wife and child had he;
But he cared no more for his wife and child
Than he did for the fish in the sea.

He'd play cards with a white man,
He'd play cards with him fair,
He'd play the hat right off his head,
He'd play him for his hair."

FRANK C. BROWN, Ballad-Literature in North Carolina (reprinted from Proceedings and Addresses of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Literary and Historical Association of North Carolina, Dec. 1-2, 1914), p. 12. Listed as found in North Carolina.

JOHN HARDY.

(Version a.)

(Communicated by Dr. H. S. Green, Charleston, W. Va. He obtained it from Ex-Gov. W.A.McCorkle, who says he has known it about twenty years.)

1. John Hardy was a bad, bad man,
He came from a bad, bad land;
He killed two men in a Shawnee camp,
Cause he's too damn nervy for to run, God damn!
Too damn nervy for to run.

2. John Hardy went to the rock quarrie,
He went there for to drive, Lord, Lord!
The rock was so hard and the steel so soft,
That he laid down his hammer and he cried, "O my God!"
He laid down his hammer and he cried.

3. John Hardy was standing on my right-hand side,
The steel hammers on my left, Lord, Lord!
"Before I'd let the steamer beat me down,
I'd die with my hammer in my hand, by God!
I'd die with my hammer in my hand."

4. John Hardy was standing at the dice-room door,
So drunk he could not see, Lordy, Lord!
'Long come his woman, five dollars in her hand,
Said "You count John Hardy in the game, God damn!
You count John Hardy in the game."

5. John Hardy went to playing in the game of cards,
The pot was broken, says, he stayed, Lordy, Lord!
He drawed the nine of diamonds to a diamond bob,
And he says, "I'll let the whole damn bill play, by God!"
He says, "I'll let the whole bill play."

6. John Hardy went staggering by the jail-house,
As drunk as he could be, Lordy, Lord!

Up stepped a leaceman, catched him by the arm,
Says, "John Hardy, come and go with me, poor boy!
John Hardy, come and go with me."

7. Friends and relatives all standing round,
Crying, "John Hardy, what have you done, poor boy?"
"I've murdered two men in the Shawnee camp,
Was too damn nervy for to run, God damn!
Now I'm standing on my hanging-ground."

(Version b.)

(Communicated by Mr. E. C. Smith, Weston, Lewis County, who obtained it from Miss Maude Rucks, Heaters, Braxton County.)

1. John Hardy was but three days old,
Sitting on his mamma's knee,
When he looked straught up at her and said,
"The Big Bend Tunnel on the C. & O. Road
Is bound to be the death of me,
The Big Bend Tunnel on the C. & O. Road
Is bound to be the death of me."

2. John Hardy was standing in a dice-room door,
Not taking any interest in the game,
When a yellow girl threw ten dollars on the board,
Saying, "Deal John Hardy in the game, poor boy!
Deal John Hardy in the game."

3. John Hardy drew his pistol from his pocket,
And threw it down on the tray,
Saying, "The man that uses my yellow girl's money,
I'm going to blow him away, away,
I'm going to blow him away."

4. John Hardy drew to a four card straight,
And the Chinaman drew to a pair;
John failed to catch, and the Chinaman won,
And he left him sitting back dead in his chair,
And he left him lying dead in his chair.

5. John started to catch the east-bound train,
So dark he could not see;
A police walked up and took him by the arm,
Saying, "John Hardy, come and go with me, poor boy!
John Hardy, come and go with me."

6. John Hardy's mamma came to him,
Saying, "John, what have you done?"
"I've murdered a man in a Chinese camp,
And now I'm sentenced to be hung, O Lord!
And now I'm sentenced to be hung."

7. John Hardy's sweetheart came to him,
She came to go his bail;
They put her on a west-bound train,
And shoved John Hardy back in jail, poor boy!
And shoved John Hardy back in jail.

8. "I've been to the East and I've been to the West,
I've travelled this wide world round;
I've been to the river and I've been baptized,
And now I'm on my hanging-ground, O Lord!
And now I'm on my hanging-ground.

9. "I don't care a damn for the C. & O. Road,
And I don't care a damn what I say;
I don't care a snap for the police."
But they let John Hardy get away, poor boy!
They let John Hardy get away.

(Version c.)

(Communicated by Mr. Lee C. Wooddell, Durbin, Pocahontas County, who obtained it from Mr. Ernie Wright, Hosterman, Pocahontas County.)

1. John Hardy he was two years old,
Sitting on his mother's knee:
"The Big Ben Tunnel on the C. & O. Road
Is going to be the death of me, poor boy,
Is going to be the death of me, poor boy."

2. John Hardy went into a Wild West show,
Playing at a fifty-cent game:
"Whoever wins my fifty cents,
I'm going to blow out his brains, poor boy!
I'm going to blow out his brains, poor boy."

3. John Hardy laid down a twenty-dollar bill,
And he didn't ask for change:
"All I want is a forty-four gun
To blow out another nigger's brains, poor boy!
To blow out another nigger's brains, poor boy!"

4. John Hardy went to New Port,
Expecting to be free.
The detective patted him on the back:
"John Hardy, go along with me, poor boy!
John Hardy, go along with me, poor boy!"

5. "I've been to the East, I've been to the West,
And I've been all over the world;
I've been to the river to be baptized,
But I'm on my hanging-ground, poor boy!
But I'm on my hanging-ground, poor boy!"

6. John Hardy had a pretty little wife,
He kept her dressed in blue.
When she heard that John was dead,
"John Hardy, I've been true to you, poor boy!
John Hardy, I've been true to you, poor boy!"

(Version d.)

(Communicated by Mr. John B. Adkins, Branchland, Lincoln County, who obtained it from David Dick, an old banjo-player.)

1. John Hardy he was a desperate man,
   He roved from town to town,
   Saying, "The man that wins my money this time,
   I'm going to blow his life away,
   And lay him in his lonesome grave."

2. John Hardy was standing in the dice-room door,
   He was not concerned in the game;
   Rozella threw down one silver dollar,
   Saying, "Deal John Hardy in the game, poor boy!"
   Saying, "Deal John Hardy in the game."

3. John Hardy threw down one half-dollar,
   Saying, "One half of this I'll play,
   And the man that wins my money this time,
   I'm going to blow his life away,
   And lay him in his lonesome grave."

4. John Hardy was making for the station that night,
   It was so dark he could hardly see;
   A policeman took him by the arm,
   Saying, "John, won't you come and go with me, poor boy?
   John, won't you come and go with me?"

5. Every station they passed through,
   They heard the people say,
   "Yonder goes John Hardy making his escape,
   John Hardy is getting away, poor boy!
   John Hardy is getting away."

6. They brought John Hardy out before the judge,
   And bond they offered him:
   No bond was allowed a murderen man,
   So they put John Hardy back in jail, poor boy!
   They put John Hardy back in jail.

7. John Hardy's wife went mourning along,
   Went mourning along in blue,
   Saying, "O John, what have you done!
   I've always been true to you, poor boy!
   I've always been true to you."

(Version e.)

(Communicated by Mr. E. C. Smith, Weston, Lewis County. It was written out from memory by Walter Mick, Ireland, W. Va., who learned it from hearing it sung by people of his community.)

1. John Hardy was a little farmer boy,
   Sitting on his father's knee;
   Says he, "I fear the C. & O. Road
   Will be the ruination of me, poor boy!
   Will be the ruination of me."

2. John Hardy got to be a desperate man,
   Carried a pistol and a razor every day;
   Shot a nigger through the heel in a Chinese camp,
   And you ought of seen that nigger get away, poor boy!
   And you ought of seen that nigger get away.

3. John Hardy's mother ran up to him,
Saying, "Son, what have you done?"
"I murdered a man in a Chinese camp,
And now I'm sentenced to be hung, poor boy!
And now I'm sentenced to be hung."

4. John Hardy's father went to the judge,
Saying, "What do you think will be done?"
The judge he answer with a quick reply,
"I'm afraid John Hardy will be hung, poor boy!
I'm afraid John Hardy will be hung."

5. John Hardy was standing in a dice-room door,
He didn't have a nickel to his name;
Along came a yaller gal, threw a dollar on the board,
Saying, "Deal John Hardy in the game, poor boy!"
Saying, "Deal John Hardy in the game."

6. John Hardy was standing in a railroad-station,
As drunk as he could be:
A policeman came up and took him by the arm,
"John Hardy, come along with me, poor boy!
John Hardy, come along with me."

7. "Oh, who will shoe your pretty little feet,
And who will glove your hands,
And who will kiss your sweet rosy lips,
When I'm in a foreign land, poor boy!
When I'm in a foreign land?"

8. "My father will shoe my pretty little feet,
My mother will glove my hands;
John Hardy will kiss my sweet rosy lips,
When he comes from a foreign land, poor boy!
When he comes from a foreign land."

9. John Hardy married a loving wife,
And children he had three:
He called to him his oldest son,
Saying, "Son, make a man like me, poor boy!"
Saying, "Son, make a man like me."

10. John Hardy married a loving wife,
And children he had three:
He cared no more for his wife and child
Than the rocks in the bottom of the sea, poor boy!
Than the rocks in the bottom of the sea."

NOTE. — The following statement was made to me in person in the summer of 1918 by Mr. James Knox Smith, a Negro lawyer of Keystone, McDowell County, who was present at the trial and also at the execution of John Hardy: —

"Hardy worked for the Shawnee Coal Company, and one pay-day night he killed a man in a crap game over a dispute of twenty-five cents. Before the game began, he laid his pistol on the table, saying to it, 'Now I want you to lay here; and the first

nigger that steals money from me, I mean to kill him.' About midnight he began to lose, and claimed that one of the Negroes had taken twenty-five cents of his money. The man denied the charge, but gave him the amount; whereupon he said, 'Don't you know that I won't lie to my gun?' Thereupon he seized his pistol and shot the man dead.

"After the crime he hid around the Negro shanties and in the mountains a few days, until John Effler (the sheriff) and John Campbell (a deputy) caught him. Some of the Negroes told them where Hardy was, and, slipping into the shanty where he was asleep, they first took his shotgun and pistol, then they waked him up and put the cuffs on him. Effler handcuffed Hardy to himself, and took the train at Eckman for Welch. Just as the train was passing through a tunnel, and Effler was taking his prisoner from one car to another, Hardy jumped, and took Effler with him. He tried to get hold of Effler's pistol; and the sheriff struck him over the head with it, and almost killed him. Then he unhandcuffed himself from Hardy, tied him securely with ropes, took him to Welch, and put him in jail.

"While in jail after his conviction, he could look out and see the men building his scaffold; and he walked up and down his cell, telling the rest of the prisoners that he would never be hung on that scaffold. Judge H. H. Christian, who had defended Hardy, heard of this, visited him in jail, advised him not to kill himself or compel the officers to kill him, but to prepare to die. Hardy began to sing and pray, and finally sent for the Reverend Lex Evans, a white Baptist preacher, told him he had made his peace with God, and asked to be

It's a dobro.

baptized. Evans said he would as soon baptize him as he would a white man. Then they let him put on a new suit of clothes, the guards led him down to the Tug River, and Evans baptized him. On the scaffold he begged the sheriff's pardon for the way he had treated him, said that he intended to fight to the death and not be hung, but that after he got religion he did not feel like fighting. He confessed that he had done wrong, killed a man under the influence of whiskey, and advised all young men to avoid gambling and drink. A great throng witnessed the hanging.

"Hardy was black as a crow, over six feet tall, weighed about two hundred pounds, raw-boned, and had unusually long arms. He came originally from down eastern Virginia, and had no family. He had formerly been a steel-driver, and was about forty years old, or more." — John Harrington Cox

END.

sentenced to hang. It is said that Hardy from his cell could see men building the scaffold on which he would be hanged and that the condemned man swore he would never suffer that kind of death. Judge H. H. Christian, who had defended Hardy, visited him in jail, and advised him not to kill himself or compel the officers to kill him, but to prepare for his death. Hardy thereafter became a Christian and was baptized in Tug River by Reverend Lex Evans, a white Baptist preacher. On the scaffold Hardy begged the Sheriff's pardon for the attempt to escape and confessed that he had done wrong, advising young men to avoid gambling and drinking. He was hanged on January 19, 1893, before a large crowd.

The ballad of John Hardy has several variants, and sometimes there is confusion between it and the ballad of John Henry (see). The tunes are somewhat similar and since both Hardy and Henry were steel drivers who had worked on the Big Bend Tunnel, it is easy to see how this confusion developed. Most versions give the name of the coal camp in which the murder took place as "Shawnee," which corresponds with what is known about the historical John Hardy. However, sometimes the murdered man is said to have been a Chinese and often there is reference to a dispute over a woman, which, if part of the actual story, cannot be proved or denied.

Further information about John Hardy is carried in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. XXXII, p. 505, and in a doctoral dissertation by John Harrington Cox in the Harvard University Library.

The following order for the execution of John Hardy is on file at the court house in Welch:

"This day came again the State by her attorney and the Prisoner who stands convicted of murder in the first degree was again brought to the bar of the Court in custody of the Sheriff of this County; and thereupon the Prisoner being asked by the Court if anything he had or could say why the Court should not proceed to pass sentence of the law upon him in accordance with the verdict of the jury impanelled in this cause, and the Prisoner saying nothing why such sentence should not be passed upon him by the Court; It is therefore considered by the Court that the Prisoner John Hardy, is guilty as found by the verdict of the jury herein and that the said John Hardy be hanged by the neck until he is dead, and that the Sheriff of the County, on Friday the 19th day of January 1894, take the said John Hardy from the jail of the County to some suitable place to be selected by him in this County and there hang the said John Hardy by the neck until he is dead, and the prisoner is remanded to jail."

JOHN HARDY. Sheet music, arranged by Elie Siegmeister.

JOHNNY, BRING THE JUG 'ROUND THE HILL. Single record, Kessinger Brothers.

JOHNSON, Jeraldine, known as "Jerry" was born in Valley

Continued on pg. 483.

JOHN HENRY: A FOLK-LORE STUDY
The Entire Study by Louis W. Chappell
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JOHN HENRY
A FOLK-LORE STUDY

BY
LOUIS W. CHAPPELL

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PREFACE

As a folk-lore figure, especially in the American black belt and border regions, John Henry is having a somewhat varied development, but rightfully belongs to the rock-tunnel gangs, the hand-drillers of the frontier. He is the great steel-driver, and as natural man flings himself, in a moment of triumph, against the machine of the industrial period after the Civil War. Like Paul Bunyan, he does impossible feats, but, unlike him, he often does them unassumingly. Thus he exists in oral tradition, and has not run, like Robin Hood, the full gamut of popular evolution, to the reductio ad absurdum of satiric parody, but with a greater metamorphosis has achieved diverse personalities and occupations, some of them superhuman, perhaps, but hardly as yet divine.

The amount and nature of the factual material that lies behind this widespread tradition has engaged the attention of several scholars, with a somewhat unconvincing variety of results. For the most part, they have added to its confusion in one way or another. John Henry was at first confused with John Hardy, another popular character in the folk-lore of the South; later he was set apart as purely mythical. These positions were taken without due regard for the tradition itself, and both have been revised or abandoned altogether. Presumably as a real man of flesh and blood, he has had some attention; but, more often than not, under the disguise of an objective treatment, a cloud of romantic idealism has obscured his more human qualities. Whether as man or myth, scholars, strangely enough, have treated him the same; and a new consideration of the whole matter, on the basis of a larger collection of data, seems necessary.

Although some ten years ago when this study began John Henry had been investigated at various points in the South, I was the first to discover the immediate region of his activity, as indicated by the tradition; and since then, with more than intermittent attention, I have followed his trail from the Great Lakes to the West Indies, and have repeatedly visited what seemed to be the most significant localities. Although some of the minor results of these investigations have appeared in the learned periodicals, the larger aspects of the subject seem to require the space of a monograph.

The contributors to this study are many, scattered far and wide. It is a pleasure to remember them, but they are too numerous to mention here. Thanks for helpful suggestions are also due to Dr. John W. Draper and Dr. Walter Wadepuhl, my colleagues in West Virginia University.

Morgantown,
July, 1932.

L. W. C.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Chappell's *John Henry* is reproduced here photographically from the original. In order to facilitate use of footnotes and index, the original pagination has been retained.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in the John Henry tradition dates back to 1909, the year Louise Rand Bascom published, from western North Carolina, two lines of "John Henry":[1])

> Johnie Henry was a hard workin' man,
> He died with his hammer in his hand[2]).

Along with this fragment, Miss Bascom contributed a version of "John Hardy",[3]) the ballad of a Negro murderer and outlaw hanged in southern West Virginia near the turn of the century. In October, 1910, two stanzas of "John Hardy" from Kentucky appeared in Berea Quarterly, and the following year Shearin and Combs mentioned as current in that state both "John Henry" and "John Hardy".[4]) In 1913, Perrow published versions of the John Henry song from Indiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi, and a version of "John Henry" from Kentucky.[5]) The same year Professor Kittredge added a text of "John Hardy",[6]) communicated by Dr. John H. Cox, who obtained it in West Virginia. The following year "John Hardy" was again reported from North Carolina,[7]) and the John Henry song from South Carolina.[8]) In 1915, "John Henry, or The Steam Drill" was reported from Kentucky,[9]) and another version published as "sung along the Chesapeake and Ohio Road in Kentucky and West Virginia".[10]) From 1909 to 1915, then, the John Henry tradition had ten reports and the John Hardy tradition but five, with John Henry far more widely celebrated than his popular rival.

In 1916, W. A. McCorkle, ex-Governor of West Virginia, contributed a seven-stanza version of "John Hardy", with stanzas 2 and 3 belonging to "John Henry", and gave out a popular report of John Hardy, the "steel-driver ... famous in the beginning of the building of the C. & O. Railroad" across West Virginia about 1872, who subsequently made his final exit in a killing down in the southwest

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[1]) Used in this study for the John Henry ballad as separate from the the John Henry song. For examples of both types, see Appendix.
[2]) Journal, XXII, 249.
[3]) Ibid., XXII, 247. For examples, see Appendix.
[4]) H. G. Shearin and Josiah H. Combs. A Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Songs, p. 19.
[5]) E. C. Perrow. Journal, XXVI, 163 ff.
[6]) G. L. Kittredge. Journal, XXVI, 180—182.
[7]) F. C. Brown. Proceedings and Addresses of the 15th Annual Session of the Literary and Historical Association of North Carolina, p. 12.
[8]) H. C. Davis. Journal, XXVII, 249.
[9]) Berea Quarterly, Oct., 1915, p. 20.
[10]) John A. Lomax. Journal, XXVIII, 14.

part of the state. McCorkle characterized John Hardy as a "man of kind heart, very strong, pleasant in his address, yet a gambler, a roué, a drunkard, and a fierce fighter", a sort of composite character.[11]) This account combines the tradition of the steel-driver John Henry and that of the outlaw and murderer John Hardy.

Following the lead of McCorkle's ballad text and hearsay report, Dr. Cox, in 1919, accepted John Henry as John Hardy, whom he identified as the Negro murderer hanged at Welch, West Virginia, in 1894, and treated the Henry ballad and song as belonging to Hardy. Among the things that appealed to Dr. Cox as significant in this body of material were "the two groups of facts in Hardy's life centring respectively about the dates 1872 and 1894, which furnish the nuclei for three types of ballad as to content: (a) John Hardy, the steel-driver; (b) John Hardy, the steel-driver and the murdered; (c) John Hardy, the murderer".[12]) By 1925 he had succeeded in bringing together nine versions of his "John Hardy", and in that year repeated his treatment of John Henry and John Hardy as the same man.[13]) In 1927 he answered objections to his thesis with a call for further investigation of the subject,[14]) and the following year renewed his request.[15])

I have already considered that request in part by an examination of the Henry-Hardy problem from the Hardy angle, the approach Dr. Cox himself made.[16]) I found that Dr. Cox had not taken fully into account the documentary records of John Hardy, that in his testimonial data he had given preference to hearsay reports, and that he had not shown proper regard for the wide diffusion of the John Henry tradition. My investigations, resulting in a fuller presentation of background material largely corrective of Dr. Cox's publications on the subject, led to the conclusion that John Hardy is properly connected with the group of facts associated with the Negro murderer around 1894, the basis for "John Hardy", but brought to light nothing to justify treating him as the heroic steel-driver connected with the group of facts around 1872, the basis for "John Henry". With these limitations to the "composite" John Hardy, this study need consider the work of Dr. Cox, his methods as well as his conclusions, only in so far as it concerns the treatment of "John Henry" as a version of "John Hardy".

Among the nine versions of Dr. Cox's "John Hardy",[17]) stanzas 2 and 3 of A, 1 of B, 1 of C, 1 of E, and all of H belong to "John Henry". The name John Hardy, however, appears in stanzas 4 and 10 of H and raises all sorts of questions; but, since the two ballads are mixed in four of the other texts, and since the names Henry

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[11]) Journal, XXXII, 505 ff.
[12]) John H. Cox. Journal, XXXII, 505—520.
[13]) Folk-Songs of the South, p. 175 ff.
[14]) American Speech, II, 227.
[15]) American Literature, I, 107.
[16]) Philological Quarterly, IX, 260 ff.
[17]) Folk-Songs of the South, pp. 178—188.

and Hardy appear together in A, one is disposed to accept them together in H. This text, though, comes from Knott County, Kentucky, and the two ballads seem not to be greatly confused in that state. It appears, moreover, that Dr. Combs contributed the ballad to Folk-Songs of the South, and then published it himself the same year as "John Henry, The Steel-Driving Man", without the name John Hardy occurring in it.[18]) Such a significant difference on the part of two noted ballad scholars in handling common material would seem to call for an examination of the texts they published relative to this study.

Their two printings of H have additional values in that direction. Dr. Cox uses the name "John Henry" for Dr. Combs' "Johnny" in line 1 of stanza 2, "&" for Dr. Combs' "and" in line 3 of stanza 2, and omits Dr. Combs' "that" in line 4 of stanza 9. Furthermore, the failure of Dr. Cox to continue his use of "etc." beyond stanza 6 resulted in the loss of "my babe" in line 4 and the necessary repetition for line 5 of each of the stanzas from 7 to 12 as given by Dr. Combs, whose mark for line 5 in stanza 2, and apparently for line 5 in all subsequent stanzas of the text, leads to a variation from his own pattern of stanza 1. Differences of punctuation and arrangement need not be taken into account.

This version, it seems, passed through the hands only of these two editors, beginning with Dr. Combs as collector. An examination of "The Yew Pine Mountains", a version of the John Henry song, contributed by Mr. Woofter[19]) and published separately by these two editors,[20]) has point in this connection.

Dr. Combs does not state when he obtained his copy of this song from Mr. Woofter, but he published it in 1925. Two years later Dr. Cox published it, without reference to its earlier appearance, and stated in a footnote that it was "communicated by Mr. Carey Woofter ... October 17, 1924". Their printings show notable differences:

Refrain, line 4:

Combs: For that's my home, babe, for that's my home.
Cox: For that's my home, babe, that's my home.

Stanza 2, line 4:

Combs: But it'll not kill me, babe, it'll not kill me.
Cox: But it won't kill me, babe, it won't kill me.

Stanza 3, line 4:

Combs: But it'll not kill me, babe, but it'll not kill me.
Cox: But it won't kill me, babe, it won't kill me.

Stanza 5, line 1:

Combs: Forty-four days makes forty-four dollars.
Cox: Forty-four days make forty-four dollars.

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[18]) Josiah H. Combs. Folk-Songs du Midi des États-Unis, p. 191 ff.
[19]) Carey Woofter, Glenville State Normal, Glenville, W. Va.
[20]) Folk-Songs du Midi des États-Unis, p. 193 ff. American Speech, II, 226—7.

4

Stanza 6, line 4:

Combs: O come back home, babe, O come back home.

Cox: Oh, come back home, babe, come back home.

These differences are significant, and seem to belong to different versions of "The Yew Pine Mountains", but Mr. Woofter seems to be an individual source.

What is the explanation of these discrepancies in common material in the hands of these two editors? Are those in the "John Henry" text to be accounted for on the ground that Dr. Combs furnished Dr. Cox a copy different from that he used in his own work? Are those in "The Yew Pine Mountains" text to be accounted for on the ground that Mr. Woofter varied his copies of the same version of the song? Possibly the editors were using different versions of the ballad and song and their variations can be explained in that way. Their editorial notes throw no light on the matter, and the answer must come from Dr. Combs and Mr. Woofter.

The fact that the former has not published his texts the second time and that the latter's ballad collection is still in manuscript form does not permit an examination of their practices in handling such material, but fortunately Dr. Cox can be tested on that score. His bibliography of 1925 [21]) shows that of his nine "John Hardy" texts he published five, A to E inclusive, in 1919, and that before this date one of them, version E, had had two printings, one by Dr. Cox himself in 1915 and the other by Professor Kittredge in 1913. Four of these texts show important variations in their several printings, and E develops a new stanza. [22])

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[21]) Folk-Songs of the South, p. 177.

[22]) Version A contains seven stanzas, and shows seven differences in its two published forms. The word "quarry" in line 1 of stanza 2 in the printing of 1925 is "quarrie" in that of 1919, "stays" in line 2 of stanza 5 of 1925 is "stayed" in that of 1919, "an" in line 4 of stanza 6 of 1925 is "and" in that of 1919, and "a" in line 3 of stanza 7 of 1925 is "the" in that of 1919. Line 1 of stanza 7 of the printing of 1925 is "Friends and relatives standing around" and that of 1919 is "Friends and relatives all standing round". The second "was" in line 3 of stanza 2 and "damn" of line 5 of stanza 5 of 1925 are not in the text as printed in 1919.

Versions B, C, and D show fewer variations in their two printings. In B the word "mama" in the printing of 1925 is "mamma" in that of 1919. In the two printings of C no important differences appear. In D the pronoun "he" in line 1 of stanza 1 in the printing of 1919 is not in that of 1925, and "that" in line 1 of stanza 5 of 1925 is not in that of 1919.

Version E was contributed by Walter Mick, Ireland, W. Va. Dr. E. C. Smith, Department of Government, New York University, collected the text several years ago and while he was a student in West Virginia University communicated it to Dr. Cox, who passed it on to Professor Kittredge for publication in the Journal. Its two earlier printings, that of Professor Kittredge in 1913 and that of Dr. Cox in 1915, are much alike, and the two later, that of 1919 and that of 1925, both by Dr. Cox, are much alike, differing materially in only two words. The word "answer" in line 3 of stanza 4 in the printing of 1919 is "answered" in that of 1925, and "Oh" in line 1 of stanza 7 of 1919 is "O" in that of 1925, with "answer" and "O" found in the two earlier printings. "I am" in lines 4 and 5 of stanza 3 in the two earlier printings is contracted into "I'm" in those of the later

What is the explanation of these discrepancies in the work of a single editor? Does their character indicate a return to the practices of 18th century ballad scholars, a modified form of development by accretion? Or can they be explained on other ground? I am not disposed to find that Dr. Cox has had his hand in matters beyond his province. Very probably some of them are typographical errors, and others may have resulted from confusions in handling a large number of manuscripts, possibly during years when he was overtaxed with other work. His confusion, in this connection, of "C. E. Smith"[23]) for E. C. Smith, "E. C. Sparrow"[24]) for E. C. Perrow, and "Negro Work-A-Day Songs"[25]) for Negro Workaday Songs possibly shows too great reliance on memory. Such variations, however, in his two or more printings of these texts seem to render unnecessary the inquiry Dr. Guy B. Johnson states that he made of Dr. Cox concerning the appearance of the name John Henry in stanza 3 of version A.[26])

It follows, then, that the appearance of the name John Hardy in stanzas 4 and 10 of H may evidence an extension of these methods in editing the text; but one will be inclined, although reluctantly, to depart from mere "happenstance" as an explanation in this case because his variation from Dr. Combs' "John Henry, The Steel-Driving Man" provides a basis for classifying the version as belonging to "John Hardy", a turn in line with his treatment of the two ballads as one, and the two men as John Hardy. Whether Dr. Cox, however, is actually responsible for the name John Hardy in the text must be determined finally by the copy Dr. Combs, the collector, furnished him. John Hardy has a way of getting mixed up with John Henry,[27]) and possibly the methods of Dr. Cox as shown in his texts from A to E did not affect his H. Nevertheless, this version, with or without the name of the outlaw, belongs to "John Henry".[28])

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two, "did not" in line 2 of stanza 5 of the earlier two is contracted into "didn't" in the later two, and "yaller girl" in line 3 of stanza 5 in the earlier two is "yaller gal" in the later two. The most significant difference, however, between the two earlier and the two later printings is the addition of a 5-line stanza, stanza 6 of the printing of 1925 and 1919, but not found in those of 1915 and 1913.

[23]) West Virginia School Journal and Educator XLIV (1915), 216. Cf. Journal, XXVI, 180. XXXII, 518; Folk-Songs of the South, p. 182.

[24]) Journal, XXXII, 513. Cf. Journal, XXVI, 163; Folk-Songs of the South, p. 177.

[25]) American Speech, II, 227.

[26]) John Henry, p. 66 (n).

[27]) Newman I. White. American Negro Folk-Songs, p. 189. Dr. White says: "Miss Scarborough (1926, p. 218) accepts Cox's opinion without discussion, but the songs she quotes mention John Hardy only." They mention John Henry only, and his bibliography gives the date of her book as 1925.

[28]) Fortunately no general destruction of "John Henry" texts has resulted from these discrepancies. The most notable case that has come to my attention appeared in Fayette Tribune, Fayetteville, W. Va., April 22, 1925.

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In 1925, the year Dorothy Scarborough accepted without discussion Dr. Cox's treatment of the Henry and Hardy traditions as one, Dr. Combs objected, and explained for "John Henry" and "John Hardy": "Elles ne sont pas davantage deux variantes de la même chanson ... Le récit dans John Henry est entièrement différent."[29]) Two years later Dr. Gordon called attention to the distinction between the two ballad heroes, and added that their songs are often "somewhat confused by the singer". He characterized Hardy as a "desperado, Henry a good-natured, almost lovable steel-drivin' man".[30]) The following year Dr. White agreed to the separation of the Henry and Hardy traditions.[31]) These investigators of popular balladry in the South added little or nothing to what was already known about "John Henry", and made no great effort to. They did little more than object to such use of Henry material as that Dr. Cox had made in taking it over for his composite John Hardy.

Dr. Odum and his colleague, Dr. Johnson, published in 1926 eleven texts of "John Henry" and four of the Henry song, and were "inclined to believe that John Henry was of separate origin and has become mixed with the John Hardy story in West Virginia." They went even farther in suggesting probabilities. Having failed in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia to turn up any biographical material for Henry as a real person, they concluded that he was "most probably a mythical character."[32])

Their fabulous John Henry apparently did not satisfy Dr. Johnson very long. The following year, after seeing the report of my investigations at Big Bend Tunnel on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in West Virginia,[33]) he renewed his inquiries, culminating in a change of heart about where to look for the hero and a shift in point of view. "All in all," he writes, on the strength of this new information, "John Henry and Big Bend Tunnel are so intimately connected that ... there, if anywhere ... we must look for the origin of the John Henry tradition;"[34]) and prefers "to believe that (1) there was a Negro steel driver named John Henry at Big Bend Tunnel, that (2) he competed with a steam drill in a contest of the practicability of the device, and that (3) he probably died soon after the contest."[35])

[29]) Folk-Songs du Midi des États-Unis, p. 104.
[30]) R. W. Gordon. New York Times, June 5, 1927.
[31]) American Negro Folk-Songs, p. 189 ff.
[32]) Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson. Negro Workaday Songs, p. 221 ff.
[33]) In September, 1925, I investigated John Henry at Big Bend Tunnel, and in February, 1927, a 19-page report of my work there fell into the hands of Dr. Johnson. I had written the report to preserve my priority claims until I could complete a larger plan of investigation on the subject, and was trying to get it published at the University of North Carolina. The following is Dr. Johnson's only acknowledgement: "I wonder to what extent collectors have made John Henry famous at Big Bend! I know of at least two others who were trailing John Henry there before I made my visit." John Henry, p. 34 (n). It would be interesting to know the other culprit.
[34]) John Henry, p. 26.
[35]) Ibid., p. 54.

In taking this new point of view, however, Dr. Johnson, in 1929, says that he began in February, 1926, "to pursue the idea that the Big Bend Tunnel was the place of origin of the John Henry tradition." [36]) What he means by the expression "to pursue the idea" is not altogether clear, but his treatment of John Henry as a myth from investigations elsewhere as already shown, and his statement at the time, several months after February, 1926, are clear enough:

> Prof. J. H. Cox traces John Henry to a real person, John Hardy, a Negro who had a reputation in West Virginia as a steel driver and who was hanged for murder in 1894. We are inclined to believe that John Henry was of separate origin and has become mixed with the John Hardy story in West Virginia [37]).

If he began several months before publishing this statement "to pursue the idea" that the John Henry tradition originated at Big Bend Tunnel, why did he offer no objection to Dr. Cox's treatment of Hardy as the famous steel-driver there? He knew that Dr. Cox in taking over the Henry tradition for Hardy had taken over Big Bend Tunnel, and that he had treated Hardy as the famous steel-driver in building it. The answer of Dr. Johnson is that he was "inclined to believe that John Henry was of separate origin and has become mixed with the John Hardy story in West Virginia". In this connection, moreover, he fails to take West Virginia into account in his schedule for another investigator:

> We have found a few Negroes who were not clear in their minds about Booker T. Washington, but we have found none in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia who had not heard something some time about John Henry. In other places, however, in Mississippi and Maryland, for instance, we understand he is not so well known. To trace the story of the ballad to its origin is a difficult task and one awaiting the folk-lorist [38]).

He leaves Big Bend to Hardy and the question of origin of the Henry tradition to the folk-lorist, several months after February, 1926, and these concessions characterize his efforts "to pursue the idea" that the tradition originated in West Virginia until he saw my report from the tunnel.

His marvellous freedom in handling this material would seem to call for an explanation of some sort. But his disregard of my rights is largely personal and need not require the attention of readers who are not interested in trifles, such as an investigator's priority claims may be, where I seem to follow him without reference in this study. The book he published, though, raises some questions that must be of general interest.

His "low-down" on John Henry doubtlessly should have first place, but a full appraisal of his part in the book cannot be made

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[36]) Ibid., p. 31.
[37]) Negro Workaday Songs, p. 222 (n).
[38]) Ibid., p. 222.

here. He says that there "are undoubtedly some vulgar versions of John Henry in circulation, but none has ever fallen into my net. I can truthfully say that the following stanzas contain the only 'low-down' I have ever heard on John Henry."[39]) The following are his first two:

John Henry had a little woman,
Name was Ida Red.
John Henry had a little woman,
She sleeps in my own bed.

Old John Henry was a railroad man,
Washed his face in the frying pan,
Combed his head with the wagon wheel,
Died with the toothache in his heel.

He probably regards these stanzas as late adaptations, not basically a part of the Henry tradition, and as well his third example which is much longer. He might have added at least three others of equal value from his own texts:

John Henry told his woman,
'I've always did as I please.'
She said, 'If you go with that other bitch,
I will not let you see no ease.'[40])

John Henry had a little woman,
Just as pretty as she could be;
They's just one objection I's got to her:
She want every man she see.[41])

'Where did you get your pretty little dress?
The hat you wear so fine?'
'Got my dress from a railroad man,
Hat from a man in the mine.'[42])

Possibly the miner and the railroad man were local merchants of a very neighborly sort, and one, if not both, of them a Santa Claus; but the hat and dress would seem to indicate at least that she was not entirely disappointed.

He adds, in this connection, his confession of faith in sex symbolism in "John Henry":

Realizing that John Henry contains excellent symbolism from the Freudian point of view, I have kept a watch for such versions, but I have never heard one. However, Prof. English Bagby, of the Department of Psychology of the University of North Carolina, tells me that he has talked to at least one Negro who definitely interpreted John Henry in terms of sexual symbolism[43]).

[39]) John Henry, p. 140 ff.
[40]) Ibid., p. 127.
[41]) Ibid., p. 124.
[42]) Ibid., p. 126.
[43]) Ibid., p. 140.

Perhaps he watched too closely to be able to evaluate objectively all that fell into his net. One of his texts contains these lines:

> John Henry had a little wife
> Who were steel corn fed [44]).

Possibly "steel corn" means only hard corn, and he has "never heard one". The contributor, of course, is the only authority for the text, but he, like the editor, can answer only for himself, not for the other thousand singers of the same version. If the "drill", "a little piece of steel", "driving steel", and "bucking steel" have Freudian values in possible connections, as his psychologist would seem to recognize, he allows none of them such a bearing in his work.

While Dr. Johnson insists on speaking "truthfully", one may ask, in view of his handling thus such materials, how fully he realized that "John Henry contains excellent symbolism from the Freudian point of view". His answer, though it hardly seems necessary, is vigorously expressed in his review of Roark Bradford's John Henry, a more recent treatment of the Henry tradition:

> And now Roark Bradford has written a book about John Henry --- but not the John Henry of the legend. His is a jazz version, so to speak ... The old John Henry was a tragic, almost a sacred, figure. He symbolized man versus the machine. This new John Henry is a tragic personality also, but in so far as he symbolizes anything it is man versus woman [45]).

Dr. Johnson had explained earlier that the word jazz deserves to head the list in Negro song for the "act of cohabitation". [46]) One thing at a time and that done well must be the rule for his John Henry, the good man hero who did nothin' but work. A "parlor" hero of the good old days when a leg was a limb and cold hands meant a warm heart. Parson Weems denied his Washington and Marion less. That it was not necessary for John Henry, widely celebrated for half a century by the "lower" tenth of back alleys and construction camps, to borrow his sex from the upper crust requires no proof.

In handling dialect, Dr. Johnson seems equally authoritative. A sufficient illustration of his success in the field is his treatment of a "big wheel turnin'" as a "corruption of Big Bend Tunnel", with the explanation that a "common dialect pronunciation of 'tunnel' is 'turnel'". [47]) While a "big wheel turnin'" might mark a stanza or version of the ballad as corrupt, I prefer to regard it as a substitution for "Big Bend Tunnel", without the necessity of finding a dialectal value in "turnel" for "tunnel". Nevertheless, he is able to characterize the dialect of Roark Bradford's John Henry as a "sort that never was on land or sea". [48]) And he is probably right at that.

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[44]) Ibid., p. 119.
[45]) The Nation, Oct. 7, 1931.
[46]) The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, April, 1927.
[47]) John Henry, p. 86 (n).
[48]) The Nation, Oct. 7, 1931.

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In the field of popular literature, as well, the innocence of Dr. Johnson is too evident from statements such as the following: "When John Hardy came on the scene, only a few snatches of John Henry remained in general circulation in West Virginia."[49]) He gives no data to show that he had made a thorough investigation of "John Henry" in that state for the last decade of the 19th century, or the occasion when "John Hardy" came on the scene. Moreover, on the basis of material in his hands at the time he might have said, without serious objection, that "John Henry" had travelled far enough to escape complete confusion with "John Hardy" when the latter ballad began its circulation in oral tradition, and that would have been sufficient for the point he apparently wanted to make, an "explanation of the mixed versions of John Hardy which Cox has found".

His statement that the "author of John Hardy ... must have been familiar with the structure of John Henry, for he cast his product in exactly the same mold",[50]) is made without giving any evidence that "John Hardy" had the author. The observed fact of their structural similarity hardly settles the matter of individual or multiple authorship for one or both of the ballads. If "John Henry" developed by stages, "required more time in the making",[51]) as he supposes, why does he find it necessary to assume the author for "John Hardy"? Does he contribute anything by such an addition, without reference, to the earlier statement, "Les deux chansons se trouvent être d'une structure analogue"?[52]) This statement allows the possibility that the two ballads derive their structural pattern from a common source, that "John Hardy" had its origin in West Virginia although when it "came on the scene, only a few snatches of John Henry remained in general circulation" in that state, or that the author of "John Henry" was familiar with the structure of "John Hardy" for he cast his product in exactly the same mold.

The separation of the two ballads is, perhaps, the best thing Dr. Johnson does in his discussion, and that is not altogether satisfactory. His materials and methods are hardly sufficient for his conclusions.

With two tunes of "John Hardy" from white people and several of "John Henry" from Negroes, he proceeds thus: "John Hardy is simple, deliberate, and puts one in mind of the conventional English ballad sung by the white mountain people. John Henry is faster, is syncopated, and is much more typically Negroid than John Hardy."[53]) Doubtlessly the tunes and rhythms of his examples are somewhat different, but they are drawn too largely from phonograph records, college student, and other soloists, with improvements by the editor as the following pages will show, to have much value, and

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[49]) John Henry, p. 64.
[50]) Ibid., p. 64.
[51]) Ibid., p. 69 ff.
[52]) Folk-Songs du Midi des États-Unis, p. 104.
[53]) John Henry, pp. 66—67.

such treatment of the two ballads does not take properly into account the frequency of Negroes singing "John Hardy" and white people "John Henry", both with notable racial variations and often a mixture of the two ballads in their performances.

He publishes a tune of "John Henry" from Robert Mason, who can pick his twelve-string box "in more ways than a farmer can whip a mule",[54]) and another from Leon R. Harris, a rambler who has worked in "railroad grading camps from the Great Lakes to Florida and from the Atlantic to the Missouri River", who has wherever he worked "always found someone who could and would sing of John Henry", and who says, "The song is sung to many an air or tune, and hardly any two singers sing it alike."[55]) Such reports are significant, and show more than the possibility of weakness in conclusions based on a few unrepresentative tunes.

Dr. Johnson, moreover, agrees that "the very essence of the work song is its fluidity, its adaptability to various kinds and speeds of work", and that a "work song tune cannot be recorded with absolute accuracy".[56]) In his earlier discussion, he notes the inconsistency of the singer:

> When the recorder thinks that he has finally succeeded in getting a phrase down correctly and asks the singer to repeat it ... he often finds that the response is quite different from any previous rendition. Requests for further repetition may bring out still other variations or a return to the previous version. Again, after the notation has been made from the singing of the first stanza of a song, the collector may be chagrined to find that none of the other stanzas is sung to exactly the same tune[57]).

He adds in the next paragraph even greater difficulties for the collector in recording "group singing in its native haunts":

> He cannot hope to catch by ear alone all of the parts - - and there are undoubtedly six or eight of many of these songs - - that go into the making of those rare harmonies which only a group of Negro workers can produce ... He must be contented with securing the leading part of the song and harmonizing it later as best he can.

These explanations seem to place accurate tunes of the two ballads beyond the reach of Dr. Johnson.

Whatever he may think about the original authorship of "John Henry" and "John Hardy", he will hardly deny that they have been through the seasoning process of group-singing, often with an exchange of units from one to the other and confusions with other songs of similar rhythmic technique, with shifts in the "six or eight" parts for different occasions, resulting in first one part and then another holding the lead. A member of such a group, or any other soloist, can take only one of these parts at a time, as in the case of his collector, and must harmonize "it later as best he can", with

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[54]) Ibid., p. 125.
[55]) Ibid., p. 90 ff. Cf. p. 17 ff.
[56]) Ibid., p. 69 ff.
[57]) Negro Workaday Songs, p. 242 ff.

the possibility of echoing the group or various groups in the several stanzas of the song. That all such soloists, or later groups, take the same leading part for their renditions is extremely doubtful. That the original "John Henry" and "John Hardy" could come through this process without modification is equally doubtful. It follows, therefore, that if one succeeds in bringing together enough examples to show tune and rhythmic differences in their survivals, they will not be sufficient for the original character of the two ballads and cannot establish their separation.

Furthermore, their original separation on the basis of current tune variations ignores too much ballad tradition. If the author of "John Hardy", as Dr. Johnson insists, was familiar with the structure of "John Henry" and cast his product in exactly the same mold, in all probability he copied his "John Henry" tune also, or rather that of his pattern. Possibly the author was one of a large group of ballad-singers who recognize only one tune for their entire repertory. Possibly the author, or some singer, transmitted the ballad as a "ballet" without tune notation, and all extant versions derive from this source. These are possibilities.

Weaknesses along such lines in the material on which Dr. Johnson bases his separation of "John Henry" from "John Hardy" place his thesis in an unfavorable light, and no great improvement of his case can be made from an examination of his tunes themselves. That they do not represent the full character of the two ballads requires no further explanation. His methods, though, of obtaining them have an importance, and they are well illustrated in his example from Odell Walker, his Chapel Hill authority for "John Henry".

He presents two examples of Mr. Walker's singing the first stanza of a single version of "John Henry",[58]) with tone and rhythmic variations, and fails to say which of the performances is the correct one. Possibly he asked for the second singing of the stanza and failed to observe that his soloist had changed drinks. Possibly he had only one rendition, and as editor harmonized "it later as best he can." Nevertheless, he gives both examples as Negroid, and uses them to show a difference between the two ballads.

In fact, he must have succeeded in getting at least three performances by Mr. Walker, as lines 3 and 4 of the three printings of the first stanza of his version show:[59])

'Fore he'd let the steam drill beat him down,
Die wid his hammer in his han'.

An' befo' he'd let the steam-drill beat him down,
Die with the hammer in his han'.

And before he'd let the steam drill beat him down
He'd die with his hammer in his hand.

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[58]) Ibid., p. 248; John Henry, p. 100.
[59]) Negro Workaday Songs, pp. 248, 225; John Henry, p. 100.

Possibly these specimens, with their several tunes, are faster, more syncopated, and "much more typically Negroid" than his "John Hardy" examples from white people. Apparently he published Mr. Walker's version in two other places, with further notable variations.[60]) Such practices must of necessity affect the evidence drawn from his texts for any purpose.

My request, in a recent note on John Henry,[61]) for corrections by Dr. Johnson of a series of misrepresentations in the testimonial data he published from the Big Bend Tunnel neighborhood has had no answer, and by way of throwing some light on his methods of handling such material a few of them may be pointed out more fully. One can easily understand that the slightest variation, conscious or otherwise, in these field reports would have significant results under his system of classifying them as "positive, negative, or indifferent" testimony.[62])

That of Cal Evans he presents as follows:

> When the tunnel was under construction he was a youngster, not quite old enough to take part in the work. He thinks there might have been a steel driver there named John Henry, but he never saw him and could remember nothing about him except what he heard later. He stated that while the story might be true he was inclined to believe that it was not[63]).

Dr. Johnson would have no great difficulty in classifying this report for John Henry at Big Bend Tunnel as "negative, or indifferent", but if it is to have any bearing on the connection of the steel-driver with Big Bend, and on the larger question of his reality, something more definite might be expected from Mr. Evans. One would like to know why he failed to see John Henry, what he heard later, when and where he heard it. After investigating the Henry tradition there, one would certainly ask what story Evans doubts the truth of. Does he doubt the truth of the story of John Henry driving steel in the tunnel, the story of his drilling-contest there, the story of his death as a result of the contest, or the story of his body being thrown into the big fill at the east end of the tunnel? Or does he doubt the truth of the story that Henry's ghost is still driving steel in the tunnel?

Like many of the older Negroes of the community, Cal Evans, according to his own statement and that of his wife, followed the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad into that part of the state. He was a native of Albemarle County, Virginia, worked first on the road near White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, later near Huntington, in the western part of the state, and around 1875 began cooking at the roundhouse in Hinton, eight miles from Big Bend. In 1876 he married a woman of Orange County, Virginia. They made their home

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[60]) The Southern Workman, LVI, 159; Ebony and Topaz (ed. C. S. Johnson), p. 48. Cf. John Henry, p. 153.
[61]) American Speech, VI (Dec., 1930), 144 ff.
[62]) John Henry, p. 34.
[63]) Ibid., p. 37.

in Hinton, where Mr. Evans continued cooking at the roundhouse until arching the tunnel with brick was begun in the early eighties.[64]) Then he moved to Big Bend to cook for the workmen, and remained there. He had no opportunity, therefore, to see John Henry drive steel in building the tunnel between 1870 and 1872.

His contact with the tunnel for half a century made it possible for him to learn the stories of John Henry there, and his practice of telling them is a matter of general knowledge in the community. Although he objects to the reports of Henry's ghost driving steel in the tunnel, and of Henry's death as a result of the drilling-contest, what he really believes can be understood only through an acquaintance with the man. He is one of the Negroes at Big Bend generally known to be afraid of John Henry at night, -- not that he admits it of course, -- but this fact must not be overlooked in reporting his distrust of the ghost story, and of any other part of the tradition, such as Henry's spectacular death from the contest, which seems to him to contribute directly to it. He says that he saw, when the railroad was being double-tracked in the eighties, a human skeleton unearthed in the road bed over the big fill at the east end of the tunnel, where the dead from building the tunnel were reported to be buried at night;[65]) but he objects to the skeleton as that of John Henry. He accepts, however, as factual the reports of Henry working in the tunnel and his contest with the steam drill.

Verification of this explanation of Mr. Evans can be made at Big Bend with no great difficulty. W. M. White,[66]) a student in West Virginia University, who since he was a small boy has had a camp on Evans' place, about a hundred yards below the east portal of the tunnel, where he employs Evans to cook for him during several weeks every summer, and where he has listened for hours in the evenings to Evans' tales of John Henry, says that Mr. Evans will not go alone at night to the tunnel, and that in going at night to Talcott, a small village just above Big Bend, he paddles his boat up Greenbrier River in order to avoid contact with Henry's ghost.

Mr. Evans is much less courageous than Mr. Anderson, the Negro keeper or care-taker of the tunnel, who has what people in the neighborhood call a "pension job". On my first trip to Big Bend, in the fall of 1925, I saw Mr. Anderson pushing a wheelbarrow filled with rubbish out of the west end of the tunnel, and called to him from the embankment fifty feet above and asked if he had seen John Henry while he was on the inside. He answered, with a good Negro laugh, that he had no faith in the stories of John Henry, and advised seeing John Hedrick, the man he regarded as knowing the facts in the Henry tradition.

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[64]) J. H. Miller says that Big Bend Tunnel caved in during March, 1883, with the result that the "railroad company was forced to arch the tunnel with brick". History of Summers County, West Virginia, 1908.

[65]) See pp. 37, 47.

[66]) Raleigh, W. Va.

Mr. Anderson explained how, in spite of the local fear of Henry's ghost, he had taken charge when he came there more than thirty years before. He had had his most exciting experience on walking through the tunnel soon after his arrival. About half the distance through he had heard John Henry driving steel, and had experienced some difficulty in waiting for a closer acquaintance with the steel-driver; yet he had been able to discover that what he heard was water dropping above the roof of the tunnel.[67])

It soon became clear, however, that his stories of John Henry were confined to the death of the steel-driver as a result of the drilling-contest and the subsequent escapades of his ghost around the tunnel. Mr. Anderson believes that a man by the name of John Henry worked in the tunnel, and seems to think everybody else should. Like Mr. Evans, though, he was not at the tunnel while it was under construction and knows only what he has heard about the steel-driver.

As respects the Henry tradition, Evans and Anderson are both "positive" and "negative", but perhaps would cause the classifier no great trouble. They accept certain parts of the tradition as factual, and regard certain other parts as "stories". The investigator, therefore, who has a use for their beliefs about Henry must be on his guard to avoid misrepresenting them, as seems to be the case in Dr. Johnson's report of Evans' testimony.

The same explanation can hardly be made in the case of John Hedrick.[68]) Dr. Johnson says that Mr. Hedrick "did not work on the tunnel". The reaction of Mr. Hedrick to this statement is about what one might expect from a Confederate soldier after telling him that he was not in the Civil War. Mr. Hedrick insists that he began with the first gangs at Big Bend and stayed on the job until the tunnel was finished. He quotes Mr. Hedrick as saying, "I did not see the contest myself, but I heard the men talking about it right after it took place." He fails to say where Mr. Hedrick was at the time of the contest, or where he heard the men talking about it. And it is important to know the meaning of right after it took place". Following this expression in the testimony, Mr. Hedrick speaks in terms of years, not in terms of days or hours. Mr. Hedrick, however, claims that while the drilling-contest was taking place inside the tunnel he was "taking up timber" to be used for arching, and heard Henry "singing and driving" in the contest. Dr. Johnson is also misleading in his further statement, "Mr. Hedrick could not say whether John Henry died after the contest, although his impression was that he did not." Mr. Hedrick is quite definite on the point, and does say with emphasis that Henry did not die immediately after the drilling-contest. This is the point on which Mr. Anderson, mentioned above, refers to Mr. Hedrick as authority in disposing of the factual basis for Henry's ghost in the tunnel. If Dr. Johnson had actually interviewed Mr. Hedrick, as he seems to expect the reader to believe,

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[67]) See p. 37.
[68]) John Henry, p. 40.

possibly he would have made a different report. Mr. Hedrick and his daughter's family with whom he lives in Hinton, West Virginia, claim that the interview was not held.

Dr. Johnson, of course, will have his own explanation for these discrepancies in the testimony he published from Big Bend. But he will hardly find it necessary to explain why, after quoting Neal Miller as using the word "contest" for Henry's drilling-contest, he states on the following page that Mr. Miller "never spoke of the episode as a contest, but as a test",[69]) or to explain the variations in his two printings of Mr. Miller's report, the third and last of the series I shall examine in this study.

The first printing of this piece of testimony is easily accessible.[70]) The second is as follows:

This man, known as Neal Miller, told me in plain words how he had come to the tunnel with his father at 17, how he carried water and drills for the steel drivers, how he saw John Henry every day, and, finally, all about the contest between John Henry and the steam drill.

'When the agent for the steam drill company brought the drill here,' said Mr. Miller, 'John Henry wanted to drive against it. He took a lot of pride in his work and he hated to see a machine take the work of men like him.

'Well, they decided to hold a test to get an idea of how practical the steam drill was. The test went on all day and part of the next day.

'John Henry won. He wouldn't rest enough, and he overdid. He took sick and died soon after that.'

Mr. Miller described the steam drill in detail. I made a sketch of it and later when I looked up pictures of the early steam drills, I found his description correct. I asked people about Mr. Miller's reputation, and they all said, 'If Neal Miller said anything happened, it happened.'[71])

The first three quoted sentences of the second printing have no near parallels in that of the first. The fourth quoted sentence of the second is a statement of fact, and differs materially from the quoted statement of this fact in the first printing:

1st: "The test lasted over a part of two days."

2nd: "The test went on all day and part of the next day."

These are important differences in the facts stated and in the form of statement. The fifth and sixth quoted sentences of the second printing are statements of fact, and statements of these facts are quoted in the first printing; but the two printings show no similarity of form. The seventh and last sentence quoted from Mr. Miller in the second printing is also a statement of fact, but differs from the corresponding quotation of the first printing:

1st: "As well as I remember ... he took sick and died from fever soon after that."

2nd: "He took sick and died soon after that."

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[69]) Johnson, Henry, p. 42.

[70]) Ibid., p. 40 ff.

[71]) Welch Daily News, (Feb. 22, 1930), Welch, W. Va.

The qualified statement of Henry's death "from fever" in the first becomes an unqualified statement in the second, and the cause of death is omitted.

These are notable discrepancies in two printings of the same report by the same editor. Does he mean to offer the first or the second printing as the correct testimony of Mr. Miller? Perhaps he has a third version not less correct than the other two. Until he designates the authentic one, however, nothing can be done by way of testing its keeping with the facts as Mr. Miller claims to know them.

The materials Dr. Johnson uses seem less important in his hands than his shifting point of view. In 1929 he prefers to believe in the reality of John Henry, but is "not irrevocably wedded to this position".[72]) In 1930, without additions to his bibliography of 1929, he is convinced of Henry's reality,[73]) and for his stronger position relies heavily on Mr. Miller's testimony, the only one of the series in question reproduced in this connection. In its second printing he prepares for his sweeping conclusion by the addition of new information such as John Henry "took a lot of pride in his work", "hated to see a machine take the work of men like him", and "wanted to drive against it", and by a general toning up of the report by omitting expressions such as "as well as I remember". Moreover, he changes the quoted statement, "If Neal Miller says it happened, then it must have happened",[74]) to a stronger one, "If Neal Miller said anything happened, it happened".

If Dr. Johnson toned up data for a stronger position when he became convinced in 1930 that Henry was real, in all probability he toned down the same data when he was "not irrevocably wedded to this position" in 1929, possibly because he was not fully divorced from his earlier spouse, his mythical John Henry of 1926.[75]) His misrepresentations of Evans and Hedrick weaken their testimony for Henry's reality: those only slightly affecting their evidence affect it negatively, and some of them are more than slight. He almost succeeds in taking Mr. Hedrick out of the picture, and yet the value of Mr. Hedrick's correct report is about equal to that of Mr. Miller, the man he sets off as his important witness, his "One man against the mountain of negative evidence!"[76]) a mountain of his own creation through manipulations under his system of classifying field reports as "positive, negative, or indifferent". After aiding all along the line toward such a consummation, he admits that one can make the evidence "lean either way".[77]) What was his purpose in such a method?

If one assumes that Dr. Johnson, in 1929, is masquerading in John Henry, capitalizing the wide distrust of testimonial data

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[72]) John Henry, p. 54.
[73]) Welch Daily News, Welch, W. Va., Feb. 22, 1930.
[74]) John Henry, p. 53.
[75]) Negro Workaday Songs, p. 221.
[76]) John Henry, p. 53.
[77]) Ibid., p. 51.

and deliberately damning the steel-driver's reality with faint praise, he might find not a little influence of the mythical character of 1926. He would know, of course, that Dr. Johnson, before making his trip in June, 1927, had examined the report of another investigator at the tunnel, a challenge to his myth, and might find that he meant to play his trump card by publishing a report in conflict. An attempt to follow him, through an imposing line of manipulations, would lead ultimately to his testimony from Neal Miller, his "One man against a mountain of negative evidence!" Possibly he understood at least the theoretical value of a single affirmative witness on a point of disputed fact. Why, then, while joining the Talcott chorus in praises of Mr. Miller's reliability, did he destroy his testimony? Did he believe that one man could affect his relationship to his mythical spouse? When he became convinced of Henry's reality in 1930, without additions to his bibliography of 1929, did he abandon her altogether? Should one regard such implications as less obvious?

The hypothesis, at any rate, that Dr. Johnson deliberately set out to destroy the evidence for John Henry as real would possibly have to take into account his changes in "John Henry" texts, and they can have no positive bearing on the matter, other than of course in so far as they evidence his wider practices in establishing a thesis. And, unfortunately, his earlier "objective studies" show the same cultural practices as regards first-hand materials. On one page in the first part of the book in which he created his mythical John Henry, he offers the following lines brought more nearly up to date:

> Goin' 'way to leave you, ain't comin' back no mo',
> You treated me so dirty, ain't comin' back no mo'.
>
> Where was you las' Sattaday night,
> When I lay sick in bed? [78])

He adds as source "songs gathered two decades ago" and published in another volume:

> For I goin' 'way to leave you, ain't comin' back no mo';
> You treated me so dirty, ain't comin' back no mo'.
>
> Where were you las' Saturday night,
> When I lay sick in my bed? [79])

These improved specimens, faster, syncopated, and "much more typically Negroid", suggest what one might find in his work if he had continued to be equally specific as to his sources. It would be interesting to know just what his collection was before his first publication.

More recently, however, he says, in a review of Roark Bradford's John Henry: "one rather hates to see one's favorite American ballad and legend sprout more new variants between the covers of

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[78]) Negro Workaday Songs, p. 20.
[79]) The Negro and His Songs, pp. 184, 185.

one novel than it would in fifty years of normal folk growth."[80]) What conclusion, then, does Dr. Johnson expect from a review of his own work? At least the name John Henry in version A of Dr. Cox's "John Hardy" should not have caused him the trouble of an inquiry.[81])

The methods of Dr. Johnson seem clear enough, and one need not urge an ulterior purpose on his part. That set forth in his preface to John Henry will take care of his work: "I conceive my mission to be to bring together and co-ordinate as much actual folk material as possible." That his apparatus, as set up for such a purpose, is not sufficient for handling historical evidence is too obvious, and one need not ask how much of his collection he regards as "actual folk material". One need not emphasize his failure to distinguish between folk materials and direct or first-hand testimonial data. His desire, perhaps, to avoid dullness should be taken into account. He states in his preface that he is "not one of those who believe that folklore studies must be dull in order to be scientific". Yet he can hardly maintain that his methods are scientific.

He renewed his investigations in 1927, with the question: "Is this John Henry tradition true? I do not consider this question of any great importance."[82]) In 1929 he concluded that the "question of whether the John Henry legend rests on a factual basis is after all not of much significance".[83]) This position is about what one might expect after examining his methods, and ample characterization of his efforts in dealing with evidence for the existence of John Henry. Why he steps aside to exploit such evidence when he knows that it is already in the hands of another investigator is less certain. Whatever his full purpose may be, his manipulations have not destroyed the evidence of Henry's connection with Big Bend Tunnel, and the larger matter of Henry's reality.

At all events, in discussing the John Henry tradition Dr. Johnson is identified with two points of view, the mythical of Georgia and the Carolinas and the factual of Big Bend Tunnel in West Virginia. The former he shares with Dr. Odum, and while ostensibly in the act of abandoning it welcomes Carl Sandburg to their camp.[84]) The latter, and the material for it, he seems to regard as his own property, and with marvellous liberality by way of invitations to other researchers, and analyses for their guidance, has handled it with great humility, and to the satisfaction of everybody.[85]) When all is said and done, however, I must insist that he "doth but mistake the truth totally."

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[80]) The Nation, Oct. 7, 1931.
[81]) John Henry, p. 66 (n). He quotes on the preceding page three stanzas of Dr. Cox's A, with five improvements.
[82]) Ebony and Topaz (ed. C. S. Johnson), p. 50.
[83]) John Henry, p. 54.
[84]) Ibid., p. 6 ff.
[85]) G. H. Gerould. The Ballad of Tradition. Cf. Louise Pound. Journal, XLIII, 126 ff. L. C. Wimberly. Folk-Say, A Regional Miscellany, 1930, p. 413 ff.

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My purpose is to throw more light on the John Henry tradition. It has already had sufficient attention as a sacred thing. I shall take into account its greater variety and wider diffusion, and present a larger body of material showing its connections with Big Bend Tunnel. Dr. Johnson has taken care of its purely negative aspects in that locality, and I can confine myself mainly to the other side without undue regard for people who never saw or heard of the steel-driver. He will appear in this work as a human being, superior of course but not without the common frailties of mankind.

THE JOHN HENRY TRADITION

The John Henry tradition is widely diffused and belongs to the folk, to the lower tenth, to bums or gods as the reader may like. He may prefer variety, or intensity. The tradition is something of an index to both, smacks of the luxuriously elemental, a prodigious reality, an articulation of what millions of toilers struggle to express, on and off, in and out, by day and by night. It is not a tale, a ballad, a song: it is all of these and more, a living thing, and as such cannot be fully presented. "John Henry", now available in nearly a hundred variants,[1]) is the best expression of the tradition.

Mr. Brown,[2]) who contributes a text of the ballad, writes from Shanghai, China, that he has heard it in many places:

I've heard the song in a thousand different places, nigger extra gangs, hoboes of all kinds, coal miners and furnace men, river and wharf rats, beach combers and sailors, harvest hands and timber men. Some of them drunk and some sober. It is scattered over all the states and some places on the outside. I have heard any number of verses cribbed bodily from some other song or improvised to suit the occasion . . .

The opinion among hoboes, section men and others who sing the song is that John Henry was a negro, 'a coal black man' a partly forgotten verse says, 'a big fellow' an old hobo once said. He claimed to have known him but was crying drunk on 'Dago Red', so I'm discounting everything he said. I have met very few who claim to have known him.

There was a giant yellow negro with only one arm who helped to put the Tennessee Central through the mountains between Nashville and Rockwood, Tennessee. His name was John Henry and his thumb was said to be as large as an ordinary man's wrist. He could pick up a length of the steel they were laying, straighten up, turn himself completely around, still holding the rail, and lower it back into place.[3]) I am not claiming this fellow as the original John Henry. He wasn't anything above the ordinary with a hammer.

This report shows more than a wide diffusion of the Henry tradition; it shows something of its character, and raises the question, Who was John Henry? with a possible answer in a "coal black man", a "big fellow", or a "giant yellow negro".

The account, however, of the "giant yellow negro" alone offers something definite for a test on this score, but he was a lifter, not

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[1]) See Appendix and Bibliography.
[2]) N. A. Brown, of the U. S. S. Pittsburgh.
[3]) Not an impossible task for a superman, provided the rail was a "60 or 70" not a "100 or 105", but this man would have difficulty in balancing.

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a steel-driver. The large number of strong men, in one way or another connected with the Henry tradition, hardly justifies even considering this fellow as the original John Henry. He is more like the "strong man John Henry, colored", of Tallega, Kentucky, as characterized by common report. "This John Henry it was said carried three large hewn railroad ties at a time in loading freight cars. He also carried a barrel of coal oil, boxes of dry salt bacon and barrels of salt." [4]) The record fails to say how many arms this strong man had.

Newton Redwine reports another John Henry of that region, a smaller man in some respects:

John Henry the steel driving champion was a native of Alabama and from near Bessemer or Blackton. This is no doubt the man in question as he died when I was just a boy and I have heard my uncle tell of his exploits a number of times. The steel driver was between the ages of 45 and 50 years and weighed about 155 pounds. He was not a real black man, but more of a chocolate color. He was straight and well muscled.

For several years John Henry worked around the iron mining region of Alabama. Later he became a steel driver and worked on the Western & Atlantic, now the N. C. & St. L., also on the Memphis & Charleston, now the Southern from Memphis to Sallsbury, N. C. His fame as a steel driver grew each year and he was in great demand on every construction job and drove steel on practically every road under construction during his day. The Queen & Crescent was his last job.

He was well known to all the old contractors and when he had finished a job he would walk thru the mountains to another, if he had the time. He finally landed at the Kings Mountain tunnel on the route between Danville, Ky., and Oakdale, Tenn., where he worked until his death. He drove steel for four years for the Cincinnati Southern ...

John Henry drove steel with a ten pound sheep-nose hammer with a regular size switch handle four feet long. This handle was made slim from where the hammer fitted on to a few inches back where it reduced to one half inch in thickness, the width being five eights in this slim part. It was kept greased with tallow to keep it limber and flexible, so as not to jar the hands and arms.

He would stand from five and one half feet to six feet from his steel and strike with full length of his hammer. The handle was so limber that when it was held out straight the hammer would hang nearly half way down. He drove steel from his left shoulder and would make a stroke of more than nineteen and one half feet spending his power with all his might making the hammer travel with the speed of lightning. He would throw his hammer over his shoulder and nearly the full length of the handle would be down his back with the hammer against his legs just below his knees. He would drive ten long hours with a never turning stroke. ... John Henry could stand on two powder cans and drive a drill straight up equally as fast as he could drive it straight down -- with the

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[4]) The Beattyville Enterprise (a weekly), Beattyville, Ky., Jan. 4, 1929.

same long sweep and rapidity of the hammer. He could stand on a powder can with feet together, toes even and drive all day never missing a stroke. He was the steel driving champion of the country and his record has never been equalled. 23

There was a white man brought from some point near South Pittsburgh, Tennessee, to work in the Kings Mountain tunnel who was a good steel driver. I think his name was Duffin. They drove steel in the tunnel heading together. They were so far under the mountain that the air was bad and stale. John Henry thought the Tennessee man would drive his hole down first and became fatigued and fell. His last words were 'Give me a cool drink of water before I die'. This was before the completion of the tunnel. He was buried not far from the South end of the tunnel. My Uncle Solomon Archilus Knox worked with him for two and one half years. This is what I have personally heard from my uncle and other old men who worked there. The best I remember it was about 1880 when John Henry died..[5])

At this point the account turns to the history of steam drills, with the statement, "At that time there were no steam drills ... not an air or steam drill dependable and servicable for nearly thirty years after John Henry's death" about 1880. Mr. Redwine should have examined Drinker's work on steam drills and tunnelling,[6]) published in 1878, for an account of the steam drill as a mechanical triumph long before that date, with its subsequent use in building tunnels in Kentucky. The line "Give me a cool drink of water before I die" is found in several versions of "John Henry", which is the chronicle of the drilling-contest between John Henry and the steam drill, and which is connected with a different tunnel as this study will show.

Although the greater part of this report, showing probably an adaptation or localization from the Henry tradition, with the heroic workman either real or imaginary as in the case of others already mentioned, seems nearer fiction than fact,[7]) Mr. Redwine has the support of a wide belief in a John Henry of that region. Mr. Washington,[8]) writing from Florida, says: "John Henry was a colored man, and I was told by my grandfather that he was born in an old log house out a little ways from Mobile, Alabama, and that is the state where he did most of his steel driving, also Tennessee." Mr. Miller,[9]) of West Virginia, adds: "My grandfather knew John Henry personally.

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[5]) Ibid., Feb. 1, 1929.

[6]) Henry S. Drinker. Tunnelling, Explosive Compounds, and Rock Drills. This work is referred to below as Tunnelling.

[7]) While Mr. Redwine's account of the steel-driver seems a little too much of the good thing, it is what might be called legitimate fiction, if not something better, and much nearer correct as a picture than the Paul Kroesen drawing of his hammer and manner of using it "made from descriptions of the weird contest given to Johnson by an eyewitness." No steel-driver ever handled his hammer in the style of this drawing. Welch Daily News, Welch, W. Va., Feb. 22, 1930. For another marvel of art, see the "Kewpie" artist's John Henry in the Cosmopolitan, Jan., 1931.

[8]) J. W. Washington, Fort Myers, Fla.

[9]) Earl Miller, Hamlin, W. Va.

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He was a negro from Tennessee. The last time he heard of him he was a steel driver somewhere in Kentucky."

Another contributor, Mr. Wallace,[10]) testifies to the sort of experience that qualifies him to speak with authority on the Henry vogue:

I am a steam shovel operator or 'runner', and have heard steel drivers sing John Henry all my life, and there are probably lots of verses I never heard as it used to be that every new steel driving 'nigger' had a new verse to John Henry.

I never personally knew John Henry, but I have talked to lots of old timers who did. I have been told by some old Rail Road construction men that John Henry and John Hardy were the same man and by some others that they were not, but I believe that John Hardy was his real name. He actually worked on the C & O Ry. for Langhorn & Langhorn and was able to drive 9 feet of steel faster than the steam drill could in Big Bend Tunnel. Then later he was hanged in Welch, W. Va., for murdering a man. After shifting out the 'chaff' think I can assure you the above is correct.

I have heard the two songs sung mostly in the same section of the country that is, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, seldom elsewhere except by men from one of the above states. I have worked all over the South, South West, and West, and have heard the John Henry song almost ever since I could remember, and it was an old song the first I ever remember of it . . .

This shift of the drilling-contest to Big Bend Tunnel satisfies the ballad account of the event, but the belief in Henry and Hardy as the same man starts something else. The report, however, is purely a popular one, and it seems that the Langhorn construction company had their first contract on the road near Big Bend Tunnel in 1894,[11]) about a quarter of a century too late for the origin of the tradition in the construction of the tunnel. Earl Smith,[12]) who contributes a version of "John Hardy", indicates that Mr. Wallace is not alone in identifying Henry as Hardy: "I think you will find John Hardy and Henry the same man, under different names."

Objections to this identification of John Henry are too numerous to be included in this work. A good example of them is that of Miss Hayes,[13]) of Kentucky: "I am telling you all I know about John Henry. He was a negro from the state of Virginia. He was not related to John Hardy. He could lift a four ton car lift so much that his feet would go in the ground up to his inkles. He was killed in the C. & O. tunnel." Miss Hayes has probably confused the steel-driver of Virginia with one of the lifters of Kentucky or Tennessee.

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[10]) C. J. Wallace, Charleston, W. Va.

[11]) G. L. Scott, Talcott, W. Va., states that he furnished the Langhorns timber for a construction job on the road near the east end of Big Bend in 1894.

[12]) Of Gates, W. Va.

[13]) Isabell Hayes, Langley, Ky.

An example equally typical is that of C. H. Board [14]) of Virginia: "John Henry was a black man. He was not related to John Hardy. Him and Milton Brooks was little related. He was from the state of South Carolina. He died driving steel."

The confusion of John Hardy with John Henry is one of the problems in the Henry tradition. How well he measures up to the popular character of John Henry can be easily shown.

Lee Holley, of Tazewell, Virginia, who claimed to be 67 years old when he made his report in 1925, offers a strong objection to such an identification, an objection with a kick:

> I've lived 'round here all my life. I've been acquainted with the camps in this section forty or fifty years. I remember seeing John Hardy pretty often, and know all about him.
>
> He was black and tall, and would weigh about 200 pounds, and was 27 or 8 when he was hung at Welch over in McDowell County. He was with a gang of gamblers 'round the camps. Harry Christian, Lewis Rhodes, Copper Boots, and Ben Red, and Jim Mason, and others besides were all about as bad as he was. They were all loafers and gamblers, and robbed the camps at night often after pay-day. Harry Christian was hung for killing Bill Crowe, and most of the gang got killed sooner or later.
>
> My Cousin Bob Holley drove steel with John Henry in Big Bend Tunnel. John Henry was the famous steel-driver there in building that tunnel. I heard Bob talk about him several times, but Bob's dead now. He's been dead ten years. I know John Hardy didn't drive steel in Big Bend Tunnel; he couldn't because he wasn't old enough when it was built, and he didn't work anyway. He got his living gambling and robbing 'round the camps.

That this account of Hardy is in the main correct is shown by newspaper records from that section on the occasion of his execution, January 19, 1894, for the "cold blooded" murder of Thomas Drews, also colored, at Shawnee Camp, near Eckman, McDowell County, West Virginia, early in 1893. His conviction followed on October 12th of that year. The hanging took place in sight of the jail in Welch, and his body was buried near the spot. [15]) Who Hardy was, or where he was from, is not known.

The real and popular personality of Hardy, as it appears in his documentary, testimonial, and ballad record, is that of an outlaw and robber, the Negro desperado around the construction camps of southern West Virginia near the close of the 19th century, and has very little in common with that of Henry, the heroic workman. Their confusion in oral tradition is hardly a phenomenal matter; the surprising thing

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[14]) Montea, Va.

[15]) Wheeling Daily Register, Wheeling, W. Va., Oct. 13, 1893; Jan. 20, 1894. The later reference explains why Hardy killed Drews, in a disagreement over a crap game: "Both were enamored of the same woman, and the latter proving the more favored lover, incurred Hardy's envy, who seized the pretext of falling out in the game to work vengeance on Drews."

is that for a while ballad scholars found occasion to add to this confusion.[16])

Mr. Redwine described his John Henry as "not a real black man, but more of a chocolate color", and introduced a white man, a superior steel-driver from Tennessee, who, he thinks, was named Duffin, and who, with the aid of bad and stale air, forced his champion to the wall. This event, real or fictitious, may have some bearing on the popular belief in John Henry as a white man from Kentucky or Tennessee.

Two reports from North Carolina are definite on the question of Henry's color. Mr. Kelley[17]) writes: "I have heard old men talk about John Henry that knew him. He was born in Tennessee and was a white man. His steel driving buddy was Ben Turner.[18]). But where he worked I don't know." Mr. Webster[19]) adds: "The contest between John Henry and the steam drill took place in the Big Ben Tunnel on the C. & O. Railway ... He bet a thousand dollars that he could out do the drill, and did so, but died shortly afterwards. He was a white man." Mr. Webster fails to say where Henry got the thousand dollars.

Hazel Underwood,[20]) of West Virginia, reports the Henry tradition in her family:

> My father has often told me about John Henry. He says he was a man of about 35 years old, strong built, had muscles was supposed to be like iron. He drilled holes in the big rock cliffs with his strong arms and his two hammers one in each hand day after day.
>
> There is no mistake about his being a white man. Papa says his last drive was made in the big ben tunnel on New River. Father says he has heard when he was a boy all about him and learned the song when he worked in the log camps, but had forgotten it till he heard part of it on a Record we have, it is just a part of it. Mamma and Pa says they can't believe this is all.

This account has a popular ring, and somewhat less authority than that of Mr. Gregory,[21]) another West Virginian, who reports the "old original song of John Henry", and who claims that John Henry was a white man.

Mr. Roberts,[22]) of the same state, along with his account of Henry as a white man, represents him as doing something besides work:

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[16]) See "John Hardy", Philological Quarterly, IX, 260 ff.

[17]) J. H. Kelley, Harrisburg, N. C.

[18]) Is it at all probable that Joe Turner had something to do with the belief in Henry as a white man and his connections in Tennessee? See Odum and Johnson. The Negro and His Songs, p. 206 ff. W. C. Handy. Blues: An Anthology, p. 40 ff. (I fail to find that an "ideal is hinted at" in Odum and Johnson's text of "Joe Turner", or Handy's idea that in this text "Joe is supposed to have been a convict himself").

[19]) H. Webster, State Hospital, Morganton, N. C.

[20]) Huntersville, W. Va.

[21]) V. E. Gregory, White Sulphur Springs, W. Va.

[22]) George W. Roberts, Sweetland, W. Va.

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John Henry was a white man, an American born English by birth. His weight - - 240 lbs at the age of 22. The muscle of his arm was 22 inches around. Many times have I seen his woman but never John Henry personal, but have worked in the mines for years with the old Welshman that sharpened tools for him by the name of Billy McKenzie.

John Henry was a native of Virginia and did actually kill himself driving steel at the Big Ben tunnel on the C. & O. R. R. in the year of 1873. He was in the penitentiary for killing a man and the contractors got him out to drive steel. He was no relative of John Hardy at all.

I am near 70 years old, and I was a miner for a great many years in the Kanawha Valley at Paint Creek after the C. & O. was built, and that is the place I used to see John Henry's wife a little ugly freckle face woman. She would come around the mines where the work was going on.

Mr. McKenzie's widow[23]) says she does not remember that her husband ever spoke of Henry or his wife in her presence. The "freckle face woman", however, will appear several times in a later chapter. She has value here only as a possible influence in the belief in John Henry as a white man and a criminal.

The same belief is reported from Virginia and Kentucky. Harvy Hicks[24]) writes:

John Henry was a white man they say. He was a prisoner when he was driving steel in the Big Ben tunnel at that time, and he said he could beat the steam drill down. They told him if he did why they would set him free. It is said that he beat the steam drill about two minutes and a half and fell dead. He drove with a hammer in each hand, nine pound sledge . . .

This is a popular report, and shows for Virginia more than an individual belief in Henry as a white man with a past. That from Kentucky is somewhat different. Mr. Barnett,[25]) who claims a career "working on railroads and 'round the coal-mines", says that he has always heard that either Henry or Hardy was a white man and a "ruff'an" from Kentucky.

Mr. Thompson,[26]) a merchant, with contacts of another sort, has heard of Henry and Hardy in Tennessee:

Having been born and raised in the state of Tennessee and, therefore, in sufficiently close contact with the negro element there, it happens that I have heard these songs practically all of my life, until I left that section six years ago . . .

I have been informed that John Henry was a true character all right, a nigger whose vocation was driving steel during the construction of a tunnel on one of the southern railways. I heard the John Henry song long before I did John Hardy. It has always been my understanding that John Hardy was a western character, probably a train robber.

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[23]) An elderly woman who divides her time among her children of Hinton and Montgomery, W. Va.
[24]) Evington, Va.
[25]) W. P. Barnett, of Magoffin County Ky.
[26]) B. E. Thompson, Sutton, W. Va.

He undoubtedly understands the "western character" to be a white man.

Two other contributors, both of West Virginia, characterize Hardy as a white man. Mr. Peters [27]) "can not say" about Henry, but explains that Hardy was a "white man lived in Logan County this state. He killed a man by the name of Vance [28]) over on the Big Sandy River in a log camp." Dr. Cox obtained from a certain Mr. Walker a "current report" in southern West Virginia "concerning a John Hardy who was a tough, a soloon frequenter, an outlaw, and a sort of thug. He [Mr. Walker] t h i n k s this John Hardy was a white man, and is s u r e that he was hanged later on for killing a man in McDowell County or across the line in Virginia." [29])

In a few of their songs, Henry and Hardy seem to have rather close white companions. A blue-eyed woman is the apparent cause of the outlaw's troubles in two versions of "John Hardy", one from North Carolina and one from Kentucky, [30]) and the steel-driver takes leave of his blue-eyed "baby" in a Virginia text of the John Henry song. [31]) Although questions may be raised about this motif as showing a belief in the two ballad figures as white men, it falls in line with the testimonial data, and this angle to the Henry tradition cannot be ignored.

The race of Hardy has been determined by his identification as the Negro desperado hanged in 1894 in southern West Virginia, but his confusion in oral tradition with John Henry and a notorious white outlaw of that section must have an important bearing on the belief in Henry as a white man, and possibly as a criminal also. Hardy might well be the contact man. Mr. Walker reported a white John Hardy, a "sort of thug", hanged for murder in McDowell County or across the line in Virginia, and Mr. Barnett has always heard that either Henry or Hardy was a "ruff'an" from Kentucky. The identification of this man is important.

In 1925 Ben Hardin was featured in a newspaper of that locality. Mr. Morton, a small boy at the time of Hardin's execution, writes:

> Ben Harden--many of our older citizens will remember this distinguished criminal who was hanged at Tazewell Courthouse on June 28, 1867, for the murder of Sanderlin Burns, who also was a Kentuckian and horse drover. Harden proposed to Burns to swap saddles, in a back alley, and asked Burns how he would trade. Burns replied to him and said 'I will swap just as though you had none' ... Harden left the scene and went to some one and got a double-barrelled shotgun ... and shot Burns. Harden was indicted at the May term of the circuit court, 1867, and was

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[27]) J. M. Peters, Huntington, W. Va.

[28]) This may be a confusion with Abner Vance, a Baptist preacher, who killed Lewis Horton in that region. See F o l k - S o n g s o f t h e S o u t h, p. 207.

[29]) J o u r n a l, XXXII, 510.

[30]) Appendix, p. 137. Campbell and Sharp. E n g l i s h F o l k S o n g s f r o m t h e S o u t h e r n A p p a l a c h i a n s, p. 257.

[31]) Appendix, p. 99.

tried ... The jury brought in a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree. After sentencing Harden to be hanged the Judge asked him if he had anything to say, and he responded, 'If this had been done years ago it would have been better for me and many others.'[32])

Two of these older citizens have made pertinent statements about the outlaw. John McCall, who "saw it all and remembers it as if it were yesterday", says his name was John Benjamin Harden. Samuel Spurgeon, who was also at the hanging, states that he "went by the name of Ben Hardin usually", and was "sometimes called John Hardin, too, and even John Hardy or Ben Hardy, but his real name was John Benjamin Harding." He remembers that Ben Hardin was a bad man, "with long black hair and a wicked look". Mr. McCall remembers that the murderer rode to "his hanging in a wagon seated on his coffin". They agree that the rope broke, and that he had to be hanged the second time. Their account of his spectacular taking-off suggests that one might expect him to gain high place in the popular repertories of that locality.

This testimony has the support of the Clinch Valley News and other newspapers of the time:[33]) One correspondent became rather dramatic in his "Execution of a Hardened Wretch".[34]) If anything further was necessary to put Ben Hardin on the honor roll of his profession, it followed in his ten-thousand-word "Autobiography", with a caption notable for its omissions:

Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Harden, executed at Tazewell C[ourt] H[ouse] on the 28th of June, 1867, for the murder of Dennison T. Burns, the 16th day of April, 1867. Startling Confessions! Boys, take warning! Fate of the spoiled child, the disobedient boy, the roguish lad, the stealthy house-robber, the dashing highwayman, the daring horse-thief, the twofaced friend, the unprincipled intriguer, the successful swindler, the heartless seducer of female innocence, and the cold-blooded assassin of seven defenceless and unsuspecting victims.[35])

Nothing is known of Ben Hardin, except the events connected with his execution.[36]) He claimed to be from Kentucky, and was hanged for killing a man, not in McDowell County, but across the line in Virginia. That he is the white man in the Henry tradition seems almost certain, although others, such as the white steel-driver from Tennessee and the "freckle face woman", cannot be entirely ignored, certainly not in their respective localities. Yet, in the nature of things, even an approximate measure of such influences cannot be made.

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[32]) Bluefield Daily Dispatch, Bluefield, W. Va., Aug. 30, 1925.
[33]) Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Lynchburg, Va., April 27, 1867.
[34]) Ibid., July 4, 1867.
[35]) Clinch Valley News, Tazewell, Va. Copy of extra edition in 1867, and subsequent to the execution of Ben Hardin, now in my possession. Its files begin around 1900.
[36]) For the court records of Hardin's trial, see John Newton Harmon. Annals of Tazewell County, II. Fuller account of the outlaw may be found in my article: "Ben Hardin", Philological Quarterly, X, 27 ff.

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The age of the Henry tradition, as noted in testimonial and documentary accounts, should prepare the way toward its place of origin. But, unfortunately, several of the reports are too indefinite on that score.

The following is an example:

I was reared in South Carolina, and there I often heard the colored men, while driving with heavy hammers, sing this much of the song in question, which seemed to be the chorus:

'This is the hammer that killed John Henry, but can't kill me;
This is the hammer that killed John Henry, but can't kill me.'

I heard one man relate to another that John Henry was a negro convict (possibly of the state of South Carolina) who at that time was hired out to a quarry company, that John was such a powerful man a bet was made on him and a race was staged with the steam drill. The drill beat him ten inches in a day, and that night John Henry died.[37])

Another of the sort comes from Mrs. Susan Bennett:[38])

Wish to say that there was a man of that day in making the big ben tunnell that whipped the steam drill down. I live in about 25 miles of the tunnell and it is as true as the song Pearl Bryant or Jessie James or George Alley and you may write to the Bureau of Information and get the History of John Henry and his captains name. We have 3 records of Johnie so I will close and listen at him drive that steel on down.

In this case, however, I was able to visit the contributor at her home a few months after receiving her report by letter, and found that she had known about John Henry from the time Big Bend Tunnel was built, between 1870 and 1872.

Elizabeth Frost Reed, of West Virginia University, reports the following lines heard sung, in 1909, by Lewis Lytle, a Negro on her father's farm at Flat Creek, Tennessee:

When the women of the West hear of John Henry's death,
They will cry their fool selves to death.

In 1900 or 1901, Mr. Bonham heard of John Henry from a grade foreman by the name of Surface, as truthful a man as he ever met, when they were double-tracking the Norfolk and Western Railroad. "According to Surface, John Henry died after he had won the famous contest wielding two 18-pound hammers, one in each hand."[39])

Several others first heard of the steel-driver about this date. Mrs. McKnight,[40]) of Kentucky, writes: "My husband was very much interested in 'John Henry' ... I don't know where he got the John Henry

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[37]) J. T. Baker, clergyman, in The Bradford News Journal, East Bradford, Va., Jan. 10, 1929.

[38]) Landisburg, W. Va.

[39]) The Bradford News Journal, East Bradford, Va., Jan 10, 1929.

[40]) J. L. McKnight, Conway, Ky., sent a text of "John Henry" a few days before he was killed in a railroad accident, and Mrs. McKnight answered the second letter to her husband.

song, or how long he had known it. He knew this song when I first met him, more than 30 years ago." Burl McPeak,[41]) another Kentuckian, says, "My father learnt it from a colored man on the C and O road about 1904." Mr. Murphy,[42]) of Virginia, fails to know "anything definite about John Henry, but about the year 1900 I first began to hear the song long before talking machine Records was known in this section." Mr. Barnett,[43]) of West Virginia, says, "It has been 31 years since I learned the song of John Henry." Mr. Boone,[44]) whose "life, up to 1925, was spent in the West Virginia hills over in the Greenbrier Valley", sends from Pennsylvania a text each of the Henry and Hardy ballads, and states: "I do not remember just the exact date I first heard the songs, but it was the colored men working on the construction of the Greenbrier Division of the C. and O. Ry. I first heard sing the songs. It seems to me it was about 1899 or 1900." Two versions of "John Hardy" in which lines of "John Henry" appear go back to this period.[45]) These reports indicate a wide circulation of the Henry tradition by 1900, and point to an earlier date of origin.

The same situation obtains for the tradition in the last quarter of the 19th century:

Joe Wilson, Norfolk, Va. In 1890 people around town here were singing the song about John Henry, a hammering man, hammering in the mountains four long years. I was working in an oyster house here for Fenerstein and Company, and I am 66 years old and still working for them people.

Tishie Fitzwater, Hosterman, W. Va. I have heard of him for 40 years. A old colored man told me that John Henry was a colored man, and he was a cousin to him. I have never heard any one say that John Henry was any relation to John Hardy, and I am sixty years old.

R. H. Pope, Clinton, N. C. Well I know of the song 41 years. I went to Georgia 1888, and that song was being sung by all the young men. I am now 60 years of age. In those days I knew all the words of that song but can't remember all of them now, but it was that he would die with the hammer in his hand before he would be beat driving steel ... He was a negro and a real man so I was told.

O. W. Evans, Editor of The New Castle Record, New Castle, Va. The writer is a man in the 50's, but as a boy and young man I can distinctly remember the song, the tune, and some of the verses, which as I remember were quite a number ... The negroes of forty years ago regarded him [John Henry] as a hero of their race.

W. C. Handy, New York City. As a composer of Negro music I seized on a melody that I used to hear when I was a little boy, at

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41) Fords Branch, Ky.
42) R. D. Murphy, N. P., Council, Va.
43) W. S. Barnett, Holstead, W. Va.
44) D. O. Boone, Knox, Pa.
45) Folk-Songs of the South, p. 178. The West Virginia Review (Aug., 1931), p. 368.

Muscle Shoals Canal in Alabama. I printed this under the title JOHN HENRY as I had heard it.[46])

Andy Anderson, Huntington, W. Va. About 45 years ago I was in Morgan County, Kentucky. There was a bunch of darkeys came from Miss. to assist in driving a tunnel at the head of Big Caney Creek for the O & K. R R Company. There is where I first heard this song, as they would sing it to keep time with their hammers.

Jesse Sparks, Ethel, W. Va. My father is 87, and he says it has been a song ever since he can remember. He says he has heard his grandpa sing it ... I am 37 years old myself, and I have been knowing it ever since I have been big enough to sing.

This testimony shows the Henry tradition widely diffused as early as the eighties, the latest date possible for its origin. The introduction of the steam drill into railroad construction in this country soon after the Civil War marks the date before which it could hardly have started. It must, then, belong to the period between these two dates.

Several of the reports connect the tradition with Big Bend Tunnel on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. George Johnston[47]) adds a fuller account:

John Henry was the best driver on the C. & O. He was the only man that could drive steel with two hammers, one in each hand. People came from miles to see him use the two 20 1b. hammers he had to drive with.

It seems that two different contracting companies were meeting in what is called Big Bend Tunnel. One had a steam drill while the other used man power to drill with. When they met everyone claimed that the steam drill was the greatest of all inventions, but John Henry made the remark he could sink more steel than the steam drill could. The contest was arranged and the money put up. John Henry was to get $100.00 to beat the steam drill.

John Henry had his foreman to buy him 2 new 20 1b. hammers for the race. They were to drill 35 minutes. When the contest was over John Henry had drilled two holes 7 feet deep, which made him a total of 14 feet. The steam drill drilled one hole 9 feet which of course gave the prize to John.

When the race was over John Henry retired to his home and told his wife that he had a queer feeling in his head. She prepared his supper and immediately after eating he went to bed. The next morning when his wife awoke and told him it was time to get up she received no answer, and she immediately discovered that he had passed to the other world some time in the night. His body was examined by two Drs. from Baltimore and it was found his death was caused from a bursted blood vessel in his head.

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[46]) Excerpt from a personal letter. Mr. Handy was born Nov. 16, 1873. Blues: An Anthology, p. 18.

[47]) Lindside, W. Va.

The information I have given you came to me through my grandfather. He was present at Big Bend Tunnel when the contest was staged, at that time he was time keeper for the crew that John Henry was working with. I have often heard him say that his watch started and stopped the race. There was present all of the R. R. officials of the C. & O. The crowd that remained through the race at the mouth of the tunnel was estimated at 2500 a large crowd for pioneer days.

John Henry was born in Tenn. and at the time of his death he was 34 years old. He was a man weighing from 200 to 225 lbs. He was a full blooded negro, his father having come from Africa. He often said his strength was brought from Africa. He was not any relation of John Hardy as far as I know ...

Considerable verisimilitude hardly characterizes all these details. The presence of all the officials of the road, with a crowd of 2500, at the drilling-contest had better be accepted as fictional embroidery. But the purpose of this study is not to emphasize the tissue of falsehood in popular reports. Big Bend Tunnel was built by a single contractor, as will be shown later, but the "two different contracting companies" may well represent two crews of workmen. The steel-driver may have had "2 new 20 lb. hammers" and used only one at a time. Two doctors from Baltimore may have examined Henry's body, but that they came to the tunnel for that purpose seems impossible of belief. His John Henry suggests the frontier strong man, who does impossible things.

Pete Sanders, an old Negro, who claims to be from Franklin County, Virginia, has lived for many years in Fayetteville, West Virginia, where with tales old and new he often entertains youngsters about town. Long years ago he learned an Indian war whoop, and occasionally, early in the morning or late in the evening, gives it from a nearby mountaintop. He says of Henry's connection with Big Bend:

I didn't drive no steel in Big Bend Tunnel. Uncle Jeff and Eleck did though, and saw John Henry drive against the steam drill, and died in five minutes after he beat it down. They said John Henry told the shaker how to shake the steel to keep it from getting fastened in the rock so he couldn't turn it. He told him to give it two quick shakes and a twist to make the rock dust fly out of the hole.

I heard the song of John Henry driving steel against the steam drill when they were still working on the C and O. It was all amongst us when I was a boy. When we boys there in Franklin County worked on the extension of the railroad up in Pocahontas County, we carried the song with us there and carried it back home when we went. It was the leading railroad song, but they've tore it all to pieces and sp'iled it. I heard it the other day on the machine, but it ain't noways like it used to be.

They said Big Bend Tunnel was a terrible-like place, and many men got killed there. Mules too. And they throwed the dead men and mules and all together there in that fill between the mountains. Uncle Jeff and me come in West Virginia together when I first come, and he showed me the big fill and said they tried to put Henry there first, but didn't do it

and put him somewhere else. The dumper at the fill was the man that knowed all about it. Uncle Jeff said one day a long slab of rock that hung down from the roof fell and killed seven men. He said he seen 'em killed, and they put 'em in the fills. The people in the tunnel didn't know where they went.

Mr. Sanders, obviously, would not be the first to object to the popular account of building the Chesapeake and Ohio:

Kill a mule, buy another,
Kill a nigger, hire another.

The "extension of the railroad up in Pocahontas County", West Virginia, where he and others carried "John Henry" as the leading railroad song, is the "Greenbrier Division of the C. and O. Ry.", where Mr. Boone first heard Negroes singing it around 1900.

Erskine Phillips, editor and publisher of The Fayette Democrat, at Fayetteville, West Virginia, is well acquainted with the southern part of the state from several years' experience as a surveyor. He says:

I had a very interesting conversation with an old negro here sometime ago. He, Ben Turner, and his brother, Sam, are natives of Old Virginia, and migrated to West Virginia, along with hundreds of other 'niggers', to work on the C. and O. Railway. They both worked in the Big Bend Tunnel. John Henry was a powerful man, large all over, but possessed of the 'most powerful arms and shoulders I ever saw. Why! man', he said, 'his arms was as big as a stovepipe. Never seen such arms on a man in my life.'

'Could he drive steel the way the song says he could?' I asked. 'Law - - I reckon he could. Make that steel ring just like a bell. But look here. John Hardy (he spoke of him both as Henry and Hardy) had a steel turner almost as big and strong as he was. Just the same as two men driving. That man could turn the steel and hit almost as hard as John Henry could. John Henry wouldn't let no one else turn steel for him.'

The John Henry song was not the one that was generally sung by the steel-drivers. If some one were hurt or killed in the tunnel, the foreman would yell, 'All right, boys, let's hear "John Henry"'. The song had the effect of sobering the workmen, taking their minds off the accident and restoring order.

Not a single detail of this report even slightly suggests that Ben Turner ever saw either John Henry or Big Bend Tunnel. The foreman would hardly call for the ballad record of Henry's death in the tunnel as a means of "sobering the workmen" when some one else got killed there, certainly not in a tunnel without an official casualty list. Moreover, the Negroes of the community are still afraid of Henry's ghost at the tunnel, et cetera. Mr. Phillips gives this as a characteristic confusion of Henry and Hardy, but explains that they are often regarded as two different men.

Miss Elsie Scott,[44]) of that section, reports her father without mentioning Hardy: "Dad worked with John Henry four years at Big

[44]) Beards Fork, W. Va.

Bend Tunnel. He was a Negro and left a son. Dad says he was the hero of the world. Dad knows a lot about old timers." The tunnel was built in two and a half years.

Sam Williams[49]) was not at Big Bend, but says that he heard of John Henry while the tunnel was under contruction:

I was working at Hawk's Nest, that tunnel there on the C and O, when John Henry drove steel with the steam drill at Big Bend further down below there. People coming down the line told us about it. They said John Henry and Bill Dooland drove steel together. That's what they said. I never did see old John, but they said he was a big powerful man.

I am 84. I turned steel for the steel-drivers. When I worked at Hawk's Nest, I worked for Major Randolph.

Mike Smith,[50]) seventy-three years of age when he made his report in 1925, had a somewhat wider range of experiences on the road, and thinks there was such a man:

I worked in putting the C and O from White Sulphur Springs to the big cut below Kanawha Falls. I worked a while with the surveyors, but later drove steel in tunnels. I didn't see John Henry. I think there was such a man, and he drove steel. I heard about him when they were working on the Big Bend Tunnel. They talked about him driving steel there, and getting killed.

B. O. Jones,[51]) a farmer of Albemarle County, Virginia, says that he worked the public roads in his neighborhood with "statute labor" during the seventies and eighties, and that at various times had in his gang Negroes who had worked on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. Among them he mentions Tom Hill, Tom Carey, and Ned Johnson, and says that these Negroes were continually singing "John Henry". He remembers that Tom Hill often talked of knowing Henry at Big Bend, where he claimed the steel-driver died from sickness about the time the tunnel was completed. Mr. Jones says that he worked no statute labor after 1889.

Mr. Logan,[52]) a native of Wythe County, Virginia, says that he went to Big Bend Tunnel to work when he was "between 16 and 17 years old":

I drove steel for Blevins four months at the east end of Big Bend Tunnel before they got the shafts in. Blevins was a foreman there, and he went from Smyth County right by Wythe.

I remember seeing Mike Breen and Jeff Davis. I didn't see John Henry. I didn't hear anything said about a great steel-driver.

When I went back to Ivanhoe, people would come in there from the tunnel and talk about John Henry driving steel with a steam drill. They had a song on it, and it was a whole lot longer than the John Henry song they sing now.

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[49]) Bluefield, W. Va.
[50]) Hinton, W. Va.
[51]) Ivy, Va.
[52]) J. M. Logan, Pownell, W. Va.

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I heard the song often before Big Bend Tunnel was finished. Mike Breen and Jeff Davis were very conspicuous among the workmen at Big Bend Tunnel. A full account of its construction should mention them on the first page. They taught the Negroes there how to do four days' work in one day.

W. M. Coleman,[53]) who was retired by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad in 1926 and put on the pension list, says that he was born in Bedford County, Virginia, and soon after the "C and O was completed started to work a track force on a section of the James River", and has worked at different places all along the line in Virginia and West Virginia:

Dick Deans, and Aaron Bailey, and Anthony Jones worked on my first crew, and off and on for a long time afterwards. They were big strapping Negroes from Campbell County, Va. They were always singing when they worked, and 'John Henry' was their best song, they liked it the best.

They worked in Big Bend Tunnel, and all of them said they'd seen John Henry drive. Dick Deans said he saw John Henry drive against the steam drill, but I don't recall anything he said about his death. They said John Henry was the most powerful man they'd ever seen, rawbony, and as black as he could be.

These Negroes are all three dead. Dick Deans was working for me at the time when he got killed on the railroad track.

A large number of these reports connect the Henry tradition with the Chesapeake and Ohio, and all but two of them place the steel-driver in the construction of Big Bend Tunnel, built between 1870 and 1872. Some of these witnesses have been employed at one time or another on the road, but all of them testify to hearing elsewhere of John Henry, not at the tunnel. The four following reports were made by men who have long service records with the railroad, two of them being employees of the company now and one on the pension list, and who testify to hearing the tradition in the immediate Big Bend community.

Cal Evans,[54]) who cooked for railroad people around the tunnel off and on for forty or fifty years, and who had an opportunity, therefore, to learn its early history, states that he heard the reports of Henry's connections there when he first moved into the neighborhood, and has heard them ever since.

E. S. Scott[55]) states that he works for the "C and O people, and started with them in 1879". He says:

I helped to clear out a wreck in Big Bend Tunnel in 1881. I heard the people there at the work then sing John Henry that beat the steam drill down, and I've heard it ever since then on the road, but I don't sing it and never did.

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[53]) Mt. Carbon, W. Va.
[54]) Talcott, W. Va. See p. 13 ff.
[55]) Montgomery, W. Va.

I remember how they talked about John Henry being such a great steel-driver, and I won't more'n about twenty years old then.

Big Bend was first arched with timber, and John Hedrick states, in the next chapter, that he had charge of that work. Falls in the tunnel caused several wrecks the first few years after its construction, and resulted in the timber being replaced by a brick arch, beginning in the early eighties. Cal Evans, already mentioned, cooked for the workmen on this job. Tom Wood [56]) says that he has lived at Big Bend fifty years, worked thirteen years helping to arch the tunnel with brick, and is now on the pension list of the road. He adds, "When we were arching the tunnel along in the eighties, holes in the heading were pointed to as those John Henry drilled. People here in the neighborhood still talk about hearing John Henry driving steel in the tunnel. Any noise in the tunnel, like dropping water, is liable even now to scare some of them."

J. E. Huston is a telegraph operator for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, and is stationed at Big Bend where he has worked for the company since 1893. He was living there when the brick arch was begun, and remembers that the workmen often spoke of the holes in the heading as being drilled by John Henry:

When I was a boy, we boys here in the neighborhood used to play steel-driving. We used sticks for hammers and sang as we played, 'This old hammer killed John Henry', and so on.

The John Henry story has been in our family ever since we moved to Big Bend Tunnel in 1881. My father worked for the C and O Railroad, and they moved him to Talcott in 1881. After we moved here I heard him talk with the people around the tunnel time and again about the contest John Henry had with the steam drill.

My mother had two old Negro house servants, a man and his wife, who quite often spoke of the steel-driver. They were certain that he was buried in the big fill at the east end of the tunnel.

Obviously the old Negroes are the best chroniclers of the Henry tradition. Like the exempla of the faithful, their tales are first-hand and have the force of reality. That of William Lawson [57]) is characterized by marvels that hardly need excite distrust. He reports his age as eighty-five and the place of his birth as Laudin County, Virginia, where his mother, 106 years old, still lives. During the Civil War he was on both sides, first with the Confederacy and then with the Union, but regards himself first of all as a farmer:

I was living on A. S. Massey's place up Falling Spring Valley when I went to Big Bend Tunnel in the spring. My brother Armstead was already there. I went to him there and stayed 'til time to cut corn in the fall. It was the year they put the hole through.

Armstead was along with John Christian and John Turner in the heading, and I drove steel under Armstead. He showed me where to drive. We were driving from the east end.

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[56]) Talcott, W. Va.
[57]) Charleston, W. Va.

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When we met a dispute arose between the two sides about who was the first man to drive a light hole through. My brother said he did, and they fussed about it all that evening. Next morning when we started working again they started the dispute again. My brother and Will Christian (Will was from the other side) shot each other dead. Armstead said, 'Your gun ain't no bigger than mine', and they both fired about the same time. Will Christian hit my brother right plumb in the heart, and my brother hit him a little on the side further toward the middle of his breast. Both of them were dead in five minutes after the guns cracked.

I was the first to get to Armstead, and turned him over. He fell on his face. Then C. R. Mason come. They buried him on the mountainside in a government graveyard.

When the hole was put through there was a great deal of whiskey in the tunnel, and that's what started all the fuss. They fussed over who put the crowbar through first, but it was the drill.

The hole had been put through three or four months when John Henry was killed. He was the best steel-driver I ever saw. He was short and brown-skinned, and had a wife that was a bright colored woman. He was 35 or 36, and weighed 150 pounds.

When I went there they had a steam drill in the tunnel at the east end. They piped the steam in. They had a little coffee-pot engine on the outside. They didn't use it in the heading, but on the bench and on the sides.

John Henry drove steel with the steam drill one day, and beat it down, but got too hot and died. He fell out right at the mouth of the tunnel They put a bucket of cold water on him.

His wife come to the tunnel that day, and they said she carried his body away, I don't know. I never saw anybody buried at the tunnel except my brother. They said they shipped some of them away, but I didn't see anybody shipped away. I don't know where they buried Will Christian. They didn't bury him with Armstead.

The time John Henry killed his self was his own fault, 'cause he bet the man with the steam drill he could beat him down. John Henry never let no man beat him down, but the steam drill won't no good nohow.

John Henry was always singing or mumbling something when he was whipping steel. He would sing over and over the same thing sometimes. He'd sing

'My old hammer ringing in the mountains,
Nothing but my hammer falling down.'

A colored boy 'round there added on and made up the John Henry song after he got killed, and all the muckers sung it.

C. R. Mason was the boss man at the tunnel. He was a good-hearted old man, but he was a tough man. He'd spit on you all the time he was talking to you. His son was named Clay Mason.

The historical residuum of this first-hand report is certainly not very considerable. C. R. Mason built Lewis Tunnel [58]) not Big Bend. The two are on the same road, fifty or sixty miles apart, and were

[58]) Tunnelling, p. 962 ff.

JOHN HENRY ON THE CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO RAILWAY

A factual basis for the Henry tradition on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad in West Virginia required the employment of hand labor and machinery together, if not continuously at least on occasion, in its construction from 1870 to 1873. If rock-drilling on the road was done altogether by hand drills or altogether by steam drills, no chance for a conflict between the two kinds of work obtained, and the tradition can have no real basis there. That the opportunity, however, for such a conflict did actually exist has more than legendary support.

In the second half of the 19th century hand labor was employed widely in tunnelling, and in some cases the hand drill was used exclusively.[1]) Steam drills came into fairly general use in the third quarter of the century, particularly in heavy tunnelling, both in Europe and America. On the Mt. Cenis Tunnel they were put "to work in full during 1861", and remained to the completion of the tunnel ten years later.[2]) Their next successful use was in the Hoosac Tunnel, where the Burleigh drills were introduced in 1866.[3]) In 1870 they were introduced into the Nesquehoning Tunnel, with marked success.[4]) From 1872 to 1875 the Ingersoll drills were employed with the Burleigh compressors successfully in building the Musconetcong Tunnel.[5])

About this date hand drills and steam drills were brought together on several lines. Notable among these was the Cincinnati Southern, with twenty-six important tunnels. In some of them hand drills were used in the heading, and in others on the bench, supplemented by steam drills.[6]) In actual practice, of course, the two types of drilling were employed together wherever the steam drill was tried out in tunnelling during its period of development, a half-century or more.

Their use together on the Chesapeake and Ohio, at some time between 1870 and 1873, is shown by the testimony of L. W. Hill, a soldier of the Confederacy, who is better known as "Dad" among railroad people around Hinton, West Virginia, where he was living when he made his report in September, 1925:

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[1]) Port Henry Tunnel on the New York and Canada, 1874—76, and Lick Log Tunnel on the Western North Carolina Railway, 1870, were built by hand labor. Tunnelling, pp. 976, 982. In Mount Wood and Top Mill tunnels, built in 1889, "all drilling was done by hand". Journal of the Western Society of Engineers, II (1897), 49.

[2]) Tunnelling, p. 130.

[3]) Ibid., p. 165 ff.

[4]) Ibid., pp. 165, 974.

[5]) Henry S. Drinker, resident engineer of the Musconetcong Tunnel. The Railroad Gazette, VII (June 5, 1875), 228 ff.

[6]) Tunnelling, p. 966 ff.

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I was conductor 35 years on a freight train on the C and O Railroad between Hinton and Clifton Forge. I am now retired and on the pension list of the C and O.

I got one of my eyes hurt by a piece of rock flying in it when I was helping to build Lewis Tunnel, which is not far from Big Bend Tunnel, just above here on the C and O Railroad. I have been troubled with my eyes ever since, but I lost the sight of my best eye first, and now I can hardly see.

A steam drill was used for a while in building Lewis Tunnel, and I ran the stationary engine that furnished steam for it. The drill could be used on a bench only, and was not a success there, and it gave way to the hand drills. Later I ran the stationary engine for lifting rocks in the shaft and pumping water.

In one way or another many people were killed in building Lewis Tunnel: many were killed from careless blasting. There was a graveyard built there along with the tunnel, and one in Big Bend Tunnel too.

Bob Jones was the best steel-driver in Lewis Tunnel, but not much better than some of the others in there with him. They usually sang a song they had composed on their work, or the foremen, or some 'loose' women around the camps. They called one of them Liza Dooley, and made a song on her.

This report of the hand drill as the important tool at Lewis Tunnel puts the type of drilling there in line with that employed generally on the road. A newspaper of the state gives "from Big Sandy to White Sulphur, a distance of at least 200 miles, the clink of the drill-hammer ... heard from early in the morn to eve."[7]) The published official records of the road make no exception to the general use of hand labor in that work.[8])

Mr. Hill's connection with machine-drilling on the road is highly significant. With the steam drill established in tunnelling by 1870, and the general airing of its marvels in engineering journals and local newspapers,[9]) those responsible for the extension of the Chesapeake and Ohio across West Virginia could not escape giving it a trial. The belief of Shanley, the contractor of Hoosac Tunnel, that the expense of hand labor there would have been "fully three times the cost of machine-drilling",[10]) and Hoosac Tunnel was well on toward completion by 1870, could not be ignored by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway whose bonds were being sold on Wall Street.[11]) Their report indicates full use of all up-to-date methods:

Beyond the great want of trained mechanical labor at that time in the Southern States, the tunnel experience upon the work of the several lines consolidated into the Chesapeake and Ohio cannot be said to have departed

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[7]) Wheeling Intelligencer, Wheeling, W. Va., Oct. 3, 1871.
[8]) Tunnelling.
[9]) Wheeling Intelligencer, Dec. 30, 1870. Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Sept. 22, 1871.
[10]) Tunnelling, p. 244.
[11]) The Weekly Register, Point Pleasant, W. Va., March 3, 1870.

materially from the routine of construction of other first-class mountain roads of the same period.[12])

Everything favored the introduction of steam drills on the road between 1870 and 1873. Through the development of the compressor system at Mt. Cenis Tunnel, their successful use in tunnelling had been noted in Europe for nine years. They had been used with marked success for four years in the Hoosac Tunnel of Massachusetts, and had just been introduced with great promise into the Nesquehoning Tunnel. They were therefore a necessary part of the equipment for building first-class mountain roads of that period.

That steam drills were actually used at Lewis Tunnel, as reported by Mr. Hill, is shown by newspaper accounts during 1871. In January of that year, the Richmond Dispatch noted that "at the Lewis tunnel, or Jerry's run, the contractors have put the steam drills in operation".[13]) In November following, Charles Nordhoff, formerly editor of the New York Post, who at the time was making a trip along the Chesapeake and Ohio across West Virginia and writing a series of letters on the progress of work on the road, referred to Lewis Tunnel "in which several of Burleigh's drills are at work".[14]) These records cover a period of practically nine months.

Both types of tunnelling, then, were employed together on the road between 1870 and 1873, thus satisfying the major requirement of a factual basis for the Henry tradition in its construction. That innovations of this sort among hand labor would be followed by drilling-contests between the old and the new was the thing to expect. That such a contest, the basic episode of "John Henry", actually took place as celebrated in popular report has every reasonable influence from these circumstances in its favor, and should not require much further evidence for its authenticity.

If the steam drills put to work at Lewis Tunnel in January, 1871, were the Burleigh drills mentioned in November of that year, and were operated continuously for almost nine months, Mr. Hill would seem to be in error; but he has the support of the chief engineer of that work, that they failed: "Subsequent to War, Burleigh rock-drill tried in the tunnel, but unsuccessfully."[15]) This statement not only establishes Mr. Hill, who had a part in testing the machine, but throws damaging light on the assumption that the steam drills mentioned in the Richmond Dispatch as having been put to work at the tunnel in January were the Burleigh drills referred to by Nordhoff in November following, and favors the inference that several steam drills were experimented with at Lewis Tunnel, those

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[12]) Tunnelling, p. 484.

[13]) Jan. 21, 1871. The Richmond Dispatch is in conflict with the Chesapeake and Ohio "records that steam drills were first introduced in construction on Lewis Tunnel the latter part of April, 1871." John Henry, p. 49. Dr. Johnson states in his next paragraph that the C and O files of reports from their engineers and contractors of this period have been destroyed by fire.

[14]) New York Weekly Tribune, Nov. 8, 1871.

[15]) Tunnelling, p. 965.

mentioned in January and November, and possibly in April, and very probably others before and after these dates.[16])

It follows that the steam drill in all probability was tried out elsewhere on the road at the time, and Big Bend, the largest tunnel on the line, had certain advantages to offer. The rock of Big Bend was different from that of Lewis Tunnel,[17]) and different results might have been expected from the machine, with the promise of a larger number of sales upon its adoption there.

So-called documentary proof for the steam drill at Big Bend Tunnel seems not to exist. The only possible reference of the sort known appears in an account of the work there about the time the tunnel was completed: "Unavoidable contingencies, such as foul air, breaking of machinery, &c., have delayed this part of the work considerably."[18]) That breaking of machinery" can have such value is very doubtful. It would mean too great reliance on the steam drill to accord with known facts. In the absence of anything better for an understanding of the circumstances at Big Bend, testimonial data must be allowed.

Neal Miller,[19]) son of Andrew Jackson Miller, a native of the community, lives about a mile up Hungart's Creek, which joins/Greenbrier River at the east end of Big Bend Tunnel. He was a member of a large family. Three of his brothers "followed" the railroad. Two are on the Norfolk and Western, one an engineer and the other a painter. The third was an engineer on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, and a few years ago "his train almost smothered him to death in Big Bend Tunnel," with the result that he died about four months later. In his neighborhood Neal Miller is regarded as having a good memory and being honest.

Mr. Miller says that he worked in Big Bend "off and on", carrying water and steel for the workmen, and knew John Henry there.

I saw John Henry drive steel in Big Bend Tunnel. He was a great singer, and always singing some old song when he was driving steel. He was a black, rawboned man, 30 years old, 6 feet high, and weighed near 200 pounds. He and Phil Henderson, another big Negro, but not so high, were pals, and said that they were from North Carolina.

Phil Henderson turned the steel for John Henry when he drove in the contest with the steam drill at the east end of the tunnel. John Henry beat the steam drill because it got hung in the seam of the rock and lost time.

Dave Withrow, who lived with his wife at our home, was the foreman in charge of the work on the outside of the tunnel where John Henry

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[16]) Such was the experience at Hoosac Tunnel. The Brooks, Gates, and Burleigh machines were introduced there in June, 1866, and replaced by the Burleigh drill in November following. Tunnelling, p. 159 ff. About 40 of these machines were discarded at Hoosac. Did the manufacturers try to sell them in the South?

[17]) Tunnelling, p. 965.

[18]) The Greenbrier Independent, June 1, 1872.

[19]) C. S. ("Neal") Miller, Talcott, W. Va.

beat the steam drill, and Mike Breen was the foreman on the inside of the tunnel there.

The steam drill was brought to Big Bend Tunnel as an experiment, and failed because it stayed broke all the time, or hung up in the rock, and it could be used only on bench drill anyway. It was brought to the east end of the tunnel when work first commenced there, and was never carried in the tunnel. It was thrown aside, and the engine was taken from it and carried to shaft number one, where it took the place of a team of horses that pulled the bucket up in the shaft with a windlass.

John Henry used to go up Hungart's Creek to see a white woman, --or almost white. Sometimes this woman would go down to the tunnel to get John Henry, and they went back together. She was called John Henry's woman 'round the camps.

John Henry didn't die from getting too hot in the contest with the steam drill, like you say. He drove in the heading a long time after that. But he was later killed in the tunnel, but I didn't see him killed. He couldn't go away from the tunnel without letting his friends know about it, and his woman stayed 'round long after he disappeared.

He was killed all right, and I know the time. The boys 'round the tunnel told me that he was killed from a blast of rock in the heading, and he was put in a box with another Negro and buried at night under the big fill at the east end of the tunnel. A mule that had gotkilled in the tunnel was put under the big fill about the same time.

The bosses at the tunnel were afraid the death of John Henry would cause trouble among the Negroes, and they often got rid of dead Negroes in some way like that. All the Negroes left the tunnel once and wouldn't go in it for several days. Some of them won't go in it now because they've got the notion they can still hear John Henry driving steel in there. He's a regular ghost 'round this place.

His marks in the side of the rock where he drove with the steam drill stayed there awhile at the east end of the tunnel, but when the railroad bed was widened for double-tracking they destroyed them.[20])

The Hedrick brothers, George, seventeen, and John, twenty-three, were living with their father within a few hundred yards of Big Bend when work began on the tunnel in 1870, and remained there while it was under construction. George still lives there, but for the last few years John has lived with his daughter's family in Hinton, eight miles west of the tunnel.[21])

George Hedrick says that he did no work in the tunnel, but that he was continually around where the men were at work, and knew "what was going on":

My brother John helped to survey the tunnel and had charge of the woodwork in building it. I often saw John Henry drive steel out there. I saw the steam drill too, when they brought it to east end of the tunnel,

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[20]) Mr. Miller made his report in Sept., 1925.

[21]) The testimony of George Hedrick, Talcott, W. Va., was obtained in Sept., 1925, and that of John Hedrick, Aug., 1927. The latter was visiting his son in Kentucky when I made my first trip to the tunnel in 1925.

but I didn't see John Henry when he drove in the contest with it. I heard about it right after. My brother saw it.

My memory is Phil Henderson and John Henry drove together against the steam drill. That was the usual way of driving steel in the tunnel.

I saw John Henry drive steel. He was black and 6 feet high, 35 years old, and weighed 200 or a little more. He could sing as well as he could drive steel, and was always singing when he was in the tunnel - - 'Can't you drive her, - - huh?'

The Hedrick brothers are sober men of good practical sense and judgement. George is about six feet tall, stands erect, and weighs around two hundred pounds, and must have been a superior man forty years ago. John is not quite so tall, but has a larger frame and muscle. He was twenty-three when the tunnel was begun, and was unquestionably well fitted for a responsible job among the gangs there. He speaks with the authority of a tunnel boss:

I was manager of the wood-work in putting through Big Bend Tunnel, and built the shanties for the Negroes there in the camp. The first work at Big Bend Tunnel was making the survey, and I helped with that. Then men came to put down the shafts, and took rock from them 50 feet down to send away for contractors to examine when they were making contracts for the work on the tunnel. Menifee put down the first shaft. When he came I went with him to help him find the place. I worked there till the tunnel was all completed.

I knew John Henry. He was a yaller-complected, stout, healthy fellow from down in Virginia. He was about 30 years old, and weighed 160 or 170 pounds. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall, not over that.

He drove steel with a steam drill at the east end, on the inside of the tunnel not far from the end. He was working under Foreman Steele, and he beat the steam drill too. The steam drill got hung up, but John Henry was beating him all the time. I didn't see the contest, because it was on the inside of the tunnel, and not very many could get in there. I was taking up timber, and heard him singing and driving, and he was beating him too.

John Henry stayed 'round the tunnel a year or two, then went away somewhere. I don't remember when he left. He had a big black fellow with him that drove steel, but he couldn't drive like John Henry.

John Henry was there 12 months after the contest. I know. He was there when the hole was opened between shaft 1 and 2. Henry Fox put the first hole through, and then climbed through it. He was a foreman, and got the watch that Johnson offered for the first man to get through. He was from shaft 2, and people on the other side pulled him through and tore off all his clothes.

I don't believe a single man got killed at Big Bend Tunnel at work. A boy fell in the shaft, and one died from foul air. A man waskilled in Little Bend Tunnel,[22]) but none in Big Bend.

These three witnesses are giving direct testimony, not popular or hearsay reports. They are not ballad-singers and general reposi-

[22]) A tunnel on the line a short distance west of Big Bend Tunnel.

tories of oral traditions, but represent the stable citizenry of a conservative community. In a court or forum of that locality, they would have the support of good character and general reliability in matters of dispute coming under their observation.

The explanation Mr. Miller makes of the steam drill at Big Bend and the subsequent use of the engine from it recalls Mr. Hill's experiences with the machine at Lewis Tunnel. His account of John Henry's death and burial is of a hearsay character, and has only the value of a report at the time. He is not alone in making this report, however, and his account of the tragic tone of the place will seem more real eventually. Mr. Miller is no apologist, and no hero-worshipper, for John Henry or anybody else, as his testimony indicates. He has the characteristic mountaineer attitude toward the Negro, and regards the famous steel-driver as rather vicious, "just another Negro", superior of course and able to claim his woman when he was present, but remembers that he was not always present. His reference to Henry's woman as "almost white" was but a cautionary after-thought to temper the blow "white woman" for the moment, and has no other value in his report. Later he talked more fully about the woman, whom he knew for several years. She lived in a little house about two miles up Hungart's Creek, and often made long trips visiting construction camps, usually of miners, along the railroad. Confirmation of this account may be had from G. L. Scott, previously mentioned, who remembers her house, her name and fame, and the man who "stood her" at Big Bend Tunnel.[23])

In his statement that John Henry sang "Can't you drive her, --huh?" George Hedrick makes a good claim for his acquaintance with the steel-drivers at the tunnel, and for the correctness of his memory. A few months after Big Bend was completed, the line

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[23]) O. F. Morton says of Negro slaves in Monroe County, which included the Big Bend community at the time the tunnel was begun: "The servants in the 'bighouse' looked down on the field hands, but both house and field servants looked down on the poor class of whites." A History of Monroe County, p. 185 ff.

In 1878, Page Edwards, a Negro living at Big Bend Tunnel, became jealous of his wife, a "bright mulatto woman of handsome appearance," and killed her. In 1907, Elbert Medlin, born in the larger Big Bend community about the time the tunnel was under construction, killed his wife because she seemed to prefer the other man. Medlin's father was a light mulatto, and his mother a "white woman of low and degraded instincts." They claimed that they were married in Ohio. J. H. Miller, History of Summers County, pp. 788, 807.

Anne Royall, a native of Monroe County, gives an example of a family of white girls over in Virginia having children by Negro men, and adds from her "poor ignorant driver" of the coach, "There were several instances of their having children by black men." Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the United States (1826), by a Traveller, p. 30 ff.

For the race problem in Virginia, see J. H. Russell, "The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619—1865," Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, XXXI.

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"Can't you drive her home, my boy?" was published as having been sung by the miners in building the tunnel.[24])

John Hedrick makes even a better claim for his memory of the tunnel. He is correct in saying that "Menifee put down the first shaft," and in Menifee's purpose in doing it.[25]) Building shanties for the workmen, surveying, and sinking shafts for rock to be used in contracting for its construction characterize the first work at the tunnel, facts that will not be questioned. Fox[26]) and Steele[27]) were foremen at the tunnel, and the former was in charge when the opening was made from shaft one to shaft two, as Mr. Hedrick states.

Testimony of this sort is not altogether hearsay stuff, and can hardly be denied value in showing the employment together of the two kinds of labor at Big Bend. These men are certain that they saw the two types of drills at the tunnel, and that a contest took place between them. Their evidence is of about equal value.

In their statements for Henry's presence, they are supported by two other witnesses, George Jenkins and D. R. Gilpin, who claim that they worked in the tunnel. These two men were not there when the tunnel was begun, but came later and saw less.

Mr. Jenkins[28]) says that he is a native of Buckingham County, Virginia, that he went with his father, a blacksmith, to Big Bend soon after the tunnel was started, that he worked at first as "tool-boy", and that later his father got him a job in the shop to "sharpen steel and other tools":

John Henry was there when I went to Big Bend, and I remember he was under Jack Pasco from Ireland. He was very black, and he'd weigh about 160. Always singing when he worked. He was a sort of song-leader. He was 30 or 35 years old.

I don't know what he did when he wasn't at work in the tunnel. I don't know when he left the tunnel or where he went. No; I don't know anything about him driving steel against a steam drill. The tunnel was all hand work.

Jim Brightwell ran the hoisting engine at shaft 2, and my brother fired for him. Captain Johnson gave a barrel of liquor when they knocked through the heading from shaft 2 to 3. Mose Selby stabbed John Hunt that day, but didn't kill him. I saw Hunt in Roanoke a few years ago.

I saw one man killed in the tunnel. He was taking up bottom when a rock fell from overhead and killed him dead. I don't remember what they did with him, sent him home to his people I suppose.

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[24]) The Mountain Herald, Hinton, W. Va., Jan. 1, 1874.
[25]) The Greenbrier Independent, Jan. 22, 1870.
[26]) The Railroad Gazette, Nov. 2, 1872.
[27]) John Henry, p. 30. Dr. Johnson quotes from Border Watchman. I have not been able to find the files of this newspaper, but other newspapers of the time often quoted from it.
[28]) Testimony of George Jenkins, 75 years old, of Montgomery, W. Va., was obtained in Aug., 1927.

When the mules came out of the tunnel some of them were blind as a bat. One went blind and stayed blind. Most of them got all right after a day or so. They put a cover over their heads for a while.

They burnt lard oil and blackstrap in the tunnel for lights.

After Big Bend was in I flagged on the work train between White Sulphur and Hinton about a year. Then I went with my father to work on a tunnel at King's Mountain, Ky. No; I knew John Henry only at Big Bend. I don't know what became of him.

Mr. Gilpin [29]) is on the pension list of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. He came to Big Bend, he says, from Knoxville, Tenn., with his father, a well-digger who had been successful in several states of the South before the Civil War in sinking wells through rock under water. His father was brought to the tunnel by Johnson, contractor, whose efforts to put down shaft one had been checked by water rising in it, and remained as a sort of boss or director of drilling and blasting in the heading. [30]) Mr. Gilpin says that he worked along with his father, carrying water and steel for the workmen.

He remembers John Henry, and describes him as black, about six feet tall, and weight "as much as 200 pounds, but not fat", with "thick lips and the prettiest set of white teeth I ever looked at". He adds that Henry, like the others, usually kept his shirt off when he drove in the tunnel:

I know that he was from North Carolina, for he used to get Pearce, my brother-in-law and a foreman in the tunnel, to write letters for him to his people there. Pearce liked John Henry because he was sensible and used good manners, and keen and full of good jokes, and he could sing and pick a banjo better than anybody else I ever saw.

My mother used to help out when anybody got hurt in the tunnel. She'd come with clean cloths and medicine. She ran a bearding house there at the tunnel, and baked bread for John Henry. He cooked the rest of his food at the camp, but he couldn't bake bread and Pearce asked my mother to do it for him. I'd often carry it to him at his camp, and he'd give me a little extra for carrying it.

I've seen John Henry playing cards, but I never saw him gambling, and he didn't swear like the other Negroes did when he was at work.

My half-brother, Jim Wimmer, drove steel in the tunnel, and he drove with John Henry when he could get the chance, because John Henry was a good worker at driving steel, and he was sensible and safe, a man of good judgment, with a good eye. There was not so much danger in driving with him in the heading like there was with some of the other drivers. John Henry was a reliable man in danger or in a risky job.

When the first light hole was opened from shaft number one to the east end of the tunnel, I dipped the liquor for the steel-drivers. Every crew tried to put their boss through the hole first, and they fought and

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[29]) Testimony of D. R. Gilpin, Hinton, W. Va., was obtained in Sept., 1925.

[30]) John Gilpin is remembered in the Big Bend community as a "good Negro-driver".

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yelled like mad men. John Henry was a mighty powerful man that day, I tell you. When they pushed my father through the hole, they pushed me through after him, and almost tore off one of my legs in doing it. Then Superintendent Johnson gave me a suit of clothes because I got hurt.

I don't know a thing about John Henry driving steel in a contest with the steam drill, and don't think I ever saw one at the tunnel. Hand drills were used in the tunnel. They were using an engine at shaft number one to raise the bucket up when we moved to the tunnel, but they didn't have any steam engine or steam drill in the tunnel.

The last time I saw John Henry, who was called Big John Henry, was when some rocks from a blast fell on him and another Negro. They were covered with blankets and carried out of the tunnel. I don't think John Henry was killed in that accident because I didn't hear of him being buried, and the bosses were always careful in looking after the injured and dead. They were afraid the Negroes would leave the tunnel.

I don't know what happened to John Henry after that accident, though. He may have left for a while and then come back again, but I can't say. I always thought John Henry died in the tunnel, but I didn't know anything about his death. I don't remember seeing John Henry after the day the rocks fell on him. I might have found out what happened to him if I had tried then, but we were not allowed to go round the camps asking questions about such things. Any man who walked around and talked about the hard life in the tunnel was allowed to stay there about two days, and that's all.

Mr. Gilpin remembers that Henry was the "singingest man I ever saw", but remembers only a few stanzas of his song:

Tell the captain, - huh, I am gone, - huh,
Tell the captain, - huh, I am gone, - huh,
Tell the captain, - huh, I am gone, - huh,
Big John Henry, - huh,
Big John Henry, - huh,
Big John Henry, - huh,

Seven others were built in the same style on these lines: "The captain can't get me", "Shoo fly up, shoo fly down", "Shoo fly all 'round the town", "This old hammer a-singing", "This old steel a-ringing", "This old sweat a-rolling", and "I am getting dry". Mr. Gilpin says that John Henry always sang "I am getting dry" when he wanted water to drink, and that as water boy he was supposed to carry it. Henry used the "huh", or grunt, to mark the strokes of his hammer.

Mr. Gilpin says that he got his "education" at Big Bend Tunnel. He talks as enthusiastically on Big Bend times as Confederate soldiers often do about the Civil War. Unlike Mr. Miller, he is a hero-worshipper, and John Henry and the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway are his heroes. He once looked at a picture of Jack Johnson, the Negro prize fighter, with full chest and muscled arms, and saw only his John Henry of Big Bend days, just as the Confederate veteran saw only his comrades of 1860 in the marching brigades of 1917. He has kept several little reminders of his connection with the road,

and takes pride in wearing its service pins. Big Bend is at the heart of his world, and he knows the place well.

He knew the two doctors who lived at Big Bend at different times while the tunnel was under construction, their families, and not a little of them afterwards. He remembered accurately a surprisingly large number of the foremen and other officials at the tunnel. He knew the engineer who drove the first train through the tunnel, and said his name was South Mack, who is not infrequently remembered in the locality as Seth Mack. He explained how Mack lost his thumbs, by inserting them into a break somewhere in his little engine, after turning it over and getting caught under it, to check the escaping steam to keep from being "scalded to death" before he could be rescued.

The reason Mr. Gilpin offers for Johnson's bringing his father to Big Bend is plausible enough. Water rising in the tunnel was one of the difficulties the engineers had in building it.[31]). He may not have dipped liquor for the men when they opened up the tunnel from shaft one to the east end, but very probably somebody did. The water boy was the proper functionary when liquor became a substitute for water, and it was used freely on such occasions there.[32]) The Border Watchman leads one to believe that Mr. Gilpin could have reported a casuality list on this occasion: "We learn that the hands on the East approach to Big Bend Tunnel and those driving the 'heading' east from Shaft 1, having knocked out the rock between them, tried to knock out each other. Several parties were severely stabbed."[33]).

The song "Shoo Fly" was widely sung on the minstrel stage of the early seventies. A Virginia newspaper observed: "Many persons who are not in the habit of frequenting negro minstrel shows have expressed a desire to know what are the words of a song to which reference is so often made in the newspapers, and the chorus of which salutes the ear in every public place. It is a nonsensical medley without rhyme or reason ... immensely popular with the masses."[34]) The Governor of West Virginia was reported as singing a part of the song when he "Broke Ground on the C. & O. R. R." in that state.[35]) Moreover, "miners hoarsely singing" and "sweat a-rolling" belong to the education of Mr. Gilpin at Big Bend. Such echoes, although some of them may not be factual, suggest that he is not entirely a man of fiction.

On my first trip to Hinton, in 1925, I mentioned "John Henry" to Mr. Gilpin, without pointing out specifically any of its details, but he seemed not to know the ballad. He remembered, with difficulty,

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[31]) The Greenbrier Independent, Jan. 28, 1871, gives an account of the use of sumps and pumps to keep the water out of the tunnel.
[32]) John Henry, p. 30.
[33]) The Greenbrier Independent, Feb. 19, 1872.
[34]) The Staunton Spectator and General Advertiser, Feb. 1, 1870.
[35]) Wheeling Intelligencer, April 18, 1870.

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only a few stanzas of the steel-driver's song. On a second visit about two years later, I again introduced the ballad, and characterized it rather fully. Mr. Gilpin commented thus: "John Henry was always singing. He would sing about his woman, giving her his hammer, wrapping it in gold, gold at the White House, and giving it to his woman, sitting on his mammy's knee, watermelon smiling on the vine, tell the captain I am gone, and like that." But he did not reproduce a single stanza of the ballad, and seemed not to be able to.

The question of Henry's woman had been raised, but no mention made of the White House, although allusion to it is found in several texts of the ballad. And "gold at the White House" is unique in the tradition. He explained: "The White House is where the President lives. John Henry and the other Negroes there in the tunnel used to sing about it, and about going there. They used to sing about Fred Douglas up there too."

He knew Henry's woman, and several others equally important in building the tunnel, and contributed rather full accounts of Lu---, Liza Ann---, Kate--, and one called "Liza Dooley", but thought this not her real name. Some of them claimed to be half Indian. One had long, straight, black hair, and another red hair. One was a fortune-teller and banjo-picker, a woman of unusual vivacity, a sort of pagan beauty, who played at dances and on other occasions of jolification, not infrequently for slightly mixed crowds. He remembered the following stanzas from her singing:

I'm going down to town,
I'm going down to town,
I'm going down to Lynchburg town,
To carry my baccer down.

Baccer selling high,
Selling at a dollar a pound,
And nobody wants to buy.

I pawn my watch,
And I pawn my chain.
Oh go 'long Liza, poor gal,
Poor little Liza Jane.

Up old Liza, poor gal,
Up old Liza Jane.
Up old Liza, poor gal,
Up old Liza Jane.

She lost her lover
And found him again.
Up old Liza, poor gal,
Up old Liza Jane.

She lost her lover
In the bottom of the sea.
Up old Liza, poor gal,
Up old Liza Jane.

WHAT BECAME OF JOHN HENRY?

If the famous steel-driver was a real man, a flesh and blood man, and actually took part in a drilling-contest at Big Bend, as the testimony shows, one would like to know what became of him. The witnesses do not know. Miller and Gilpin seem to think that he died at the tunnel. John Hedrick is quite certain that he did not, and says that he "went away somewhere".

A strong belief in Henry's death at Big Bend is shown by the popular reports presented in the second chapter of this study. The ballad mentions his death there. Among the Negroes of the community nothing seems more real than his ghost. The ghost's driving steel in the tunnel is highly significant of the manner, as well as the fact, of his death, and modern ghosts are supposed to have such values.[1]) Bridge and tunnel ghosts may not always be, if ever, full adoptions, or made from the whole cloth. And building Big Bend Tunnel made possible the only plausible occasion for starting such a belief, factual or fictitious. The character of the tradition seems to favor his actual death there, from a drilling-contest, or in some other way.

The witnesses for Henry are certain of their acquaintance with him at the tunnel, and the conclusion that he died immediately after, and as a result of, the drilling-contest, that reported by Miller and the Hedricks, would seem to dispose of their testimony as lacking authority. This does not necessarily follow.

Among them only Gilpin claims the sort of acquaintance with the steel-driver that would make a confusion between him and another Negro at Big Bend hardly possible, and Gilpin was late in getting to the tunnel, probably almost a year after it was begun. If the drilling-contest occurred early in the work there, as shown by the testimony, and Henry died immediately as a result of it, the steel-driver who took his place among the tunnel Negroes might have resembled him very closely, and was almost certainly called John

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[1]) A case in point was reported for a tunnel in the state about six months before Big Bend was begun. Hempfield Tunnel, near Wheeling, was "full" of ghosts of murdered men. They were reported as having been seen in the act of being murdered, as the men killed there were. "At the mouth of the tunnel is a sequestered spot known as Berry's Hole. Its name is significant, as its record shows it to be the watery grave of many poor fellows. In the memory of many of our readers the history of Schaffer, the blood-thirsty and brutal murderer, who expiated his crimes on the scaffold at Parkersburg, is still fresh. The slaughter of one of his victims took place in the tunnel is well known and is supposed to have immediate reference to the appearance of the ghost last week ... Other deeds of this kind [in this tunnel] are too well known to bear repetition." Wheeling Intelligencer, July 19, 1869.

Henry. He would have been the only John Henry there known to Gilpin and Jenkins, and eventually best known to Miller and the Hedricks, and they might easily have accepted him as the hero of the contest because they had had no particular reason to observe the original John Henry at all closely. Tragedies at the tunnel were not matters for open discussion, and this might explain the failure of Gilpin and Jenkins to hear anything said about the contest. This might also explain Gilpin's failure to remember any stanza of the John Henry song mentioning the fact of his death, or to remember a single stanza of the ballad.

The theory that John Henry died in a second drilling-contest at Big Bend seems less probable, and could hardly have happened without the knowledge of the witnesses for the steel-driver at the tunnel. The introduction, however, of a second machine before the tunnel was completed would have meant a second drilling-contest if Henry won the first without any serious injury to himself, provided he was there at the time.

The drilling-contest established at Big Bend by the testimonial data probably occurred in the summer or fall of 1870. The first work was done on the tunnel in January of that year, beginning the last few days of the month, and J. M. Logan states that he worked four months there before the shafts were in and then returned to Ivanhoe, and that he heard of the contest between Henry and the steam drill when he went back to Ivanhoe. His departure from the tunnel, therefore, was in the summer or early fall, and he heard of the contest soon after. The fact that it occurred at the east end of Big Bend, according to the testimony, shows that it took place early in the work on the tunnel, and that was the first section of the tunnel completed. Between the summer or fall of 1870 and the completion of the tunnel in June, 1872, was a period of practically two years in which a second drilling-contest could have taken place.

The steam drill was at Lewis Tunnel in January and November, and possibly in April, of 1871, and also very probably in 1870 about the time it was being tried at Big Bend. The probability is that the drill characterized as a failure at Lewis Tunnel, but mentioned as being in use there on three occasions covering a period of almost nine months, was not the same drill but two or more drills of different makes, or the same drill operated each time with a different compressor, by way of experiment. Such tests, as well, may have been carried out at Big Bend. The two tunnels were constructed by different men under different contracts, and their character differed in the obstacles offered for the machine. Big Bend was drilled through "hard red shale", and Lewis Tunnel through "hard sandstone with some little slate".[2]). The failure, therefore, of the drill at Lewis Tunnel would not have meant its failure at Big Bend; and the second drilling-contest there, with the death of the steel-driver as a result, was at least possible and may have occurred.

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[2]) Tunnelling, p. 965.

In an effort to account for the discrepancy between the testimony and the popular report of Henry's death as a result of the drilling-contest, the theory that the steel-driver met his death in some other way at the tunnel and that the report of the event became confused with that of the contest through oral transmission seems more probable. It leads to an inquiry as to the actual conditions under which the tunnel was built.

The testimony is highly suggestive but inadequate for a full understanding of the tragic circumstances at Big Bend, as becomes increasingly evident as one examines the construction of heavy tunnels in Europe and America during the second half of the 19th century. The startling number of casualties from building Mt. Cenis and the Hoosac tunnels [3]) indicates the incorrectness of such a statement as that of John Hedrick that none was killed in Big Bend. Miller's report that bodies of Negroes killed in the tunnel, along with that of a mule, were buried in the big fill at the east portal is much less improbable. Many of the foremen and other officials on the road had been in the Confederate Army. It was not always convenient there to bury the dead properly, or to advertise the casualty list as a means of keeping up the morale of the forces. That it was necessary to protect the morale of the Negroes at Big Bend and that those in charge were not always equal to the task can hardly be doubted. A brief account of the circumstances there will show that the place was not in the least inviting. Miller's statement that all the Negroes refused to go into the tunnel for several days on one occasion seems to be common knowledge in the neighborhood. It was the only detail the widow of Jeff Davis, previously mentioned, could remember at all distinctly about the construction of the tunnel when I visited her in September, 1925. [4])

Nordhoff states that the laborers on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway were mostly Negroes, ignorant, and "much crowded together" in the tunnels. [5]) The number of such laborers in Big Bend during the two years and a half of its construction was probably about 1,000. The number for Musconetcong Tunnel was 1,000, [6]) and that for Hoosac, 900. [7]) Big Bend is about one-third longer than the former, and one-third of the length of the latter. But the labor of Hoosac Tunnel was "chiefly of the kind termed 'skilled labor', the underground workers being, for the most part, regularly bred miners (a large porportion of them being of the very best Cornish miners)." [8]) Big Bend was built with ignorant, superstitious Negroes "much crowded together" in the tunnel.

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[3]) P. 69.
[4]) A similar act on the part of laborers at Midland Tunnel was noted in the Wheeling Intelligencer, March 8, 1871.
[5]) New York Weekly Tribune, Oct. 18 and Nov. 1, 1871.
[6]) The Railroad Gazette, VII (June, 1875), 241.
[7]) Journal of the Franklin Institute, XCI (1871), 148.
[8]) Ibid., XCI, 148.

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The following lines, under the title "Big Bend Times",[9]) published with apologies by a local newspaper about six months after the road was completed across the state, was written presumably by an employee at the tunnel, and is the only published account from the inside of Big Bend known to exist:

Big Bend times now pass before me,
Tunnel scenes of long ago;
With the loose rock hanging o'er me,
More dangerous far than human foe.
Days that knew no time of leisure,
Days from working never free;
When the hopeful dreamed of pleasure,
When the tunnel through should be.

Fancy hears the hammers ringing - -
Sounds that now my dream annoy - -
And the miners hoarsely singing
'Can't you drive her home, my boy?'
Hears the bosses loudly swearing
At some idler whom they see,
Who plainly is not caring
When the tunnel through should be.

What though looser roofs beset me,
Though down deeper shafts I go;
Yet I never will forget thee,
Number two, of long ago.
And when railroad life is ended,
Oh! what pleasure we could see,
If we owned the means expended,
That the tunnel through should be.

That Big Bend was not altogether a pastoral scene has support from the inside of Mt. Cenis. In that tunnel "one was almost smothered so great was the heat; the smoke from the blasts became so thick that the light of the lamps was visible no farther than a few steps." The writer describes blasting there: "Suddenly an infernal noise burst upon us from the end of the gallery. One would have said that ten thousand hammers were falling simultaneously on their anvils. A sharp whistling sound made itself heard above this clamor, piercing you to the very marrow."[10]) Clouds of "yellow smoke come pouring through the tunnel in such density and volume as to be positively painful."[11]) The inferno of St. Gothard was hardly more inviting: "As the work progressed the temperature rose and the air became more vitiated, until visitors were rarely permitted to enter because of the sheer danger of being in such an atmosphere, and the horses on the job died at the rate of ten a month. The scene in the scantily lighted tunnel grew to resemble an inferno, men going about

[9]) The Mountain Herald, Hinton, W. Va., Jan. 1, 1874.
[10]) Every Saturday, Oct. 14, 1871.
[11]) Wheeling Intelligencer, Dec. 30, 1870.

naked in the intense heat." [12]) In such tangible darkness, heat, noise, and smoke, the "loose rock" overhead would seem to promise immediate relief; and nothing "haunts the mine worker more than a fall of the strata which he calls the roof." [13])

Drinker explains that "no man but a tunnel engineer can appreciate the difficulties and dangers of tunnel construction - - it is not a question of calculating certain strains and allowing certain factors of safety, but a very vying with the unknown powers of darkness, all the more to be feared because one can never know what a day's advance may bring forth." [14]) Of these uncertainties, tunnel-sickness, blasting, and the roof seem to offer the greatest dangers to life, and Big Bend had a full share of all three.

In the St. Gothard Tunnel, "men died in large numbers of a peculiar disease, called tunnel trichinosis ... Three or four months' labor in the tunnel brought on the disease." [15]) It is not certain that this disease affected any of the Virginia Negroes on the Chesapeake and Ohio, but the fact that horses on the job at St. Gothard died at the rate of ten a month suggests the great probability of deaths at Big Bend from some kind of sickness. The statement that "foul air gives much trouble and there is a great deal of sickness among the employes" of Big Bend [16]) is significant, and very much so when John Hedrick, one of the tunnel officials, admits that one died there from foul air. Twenty-three suits, alleging damages amounting to almost five hundred thousand dollars "for death, injury, or sickness" of workmen on a tunnel under construction in the county adjoining that in which Big Bend lies, are awaiting trial at the present time. "Silicosis from dust particles" seems to be the basis for the complaints. Six are already dead. [17]) What are the probabilities for Big Bend?

Foul air was one of the greatest tunnel problems of the period, and nothing very effective was done about it. The practice of pumping fresh air to the drillers was, it seems, first emphasized at Arlberg Tunnel, which was begun in 1880. Stone dust, to which "miners' consumption" was largely attributable, was checked even later by the introduction of hollow drills with a small stream of water running through them. In Mt. Cenis "one was almost smothered so great was the heat"; in St. Gothard the men went "about naked in the intense heat"; and in Big Bend the steel-drivers worked with their "shirts off". Blasting and the crude ways of lighting tunnels at the time added to their foulness.

An idea of the amount of explosives for blasting and of candles for lighting used in Big Bend Tunnel may be had from an examination of their use in the Hoosac Tunnel. The records show that "during

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[12]) New York Times, March 16, 1930.
[13]) G. G. Carson. Songs and Ballads of the Anthracite Miner, p. 151.
[14]) Tunnelling, p. 486.
[15]) Tunnelling (3rd ed., 1893), p. 367.
[16]) Wheeling Daily Register, May 21, 1872.
[17]) Morgantown Post, Sept. 6, 1932.

five years' time, about 444,735 lbs. of nitroglycerine and about 100,000 lbs. of mica powder [mica impregnated with nitroglycerin] were used" in Hoosac,[18]) making about 500,000 pounds of pure nitroglycerin used in the tunnel in five years. The assumption that half of this amount of nitroglycerin was used at Big Bend during the two years and a half it was under construction gives 250,000 pounds for that work, approximately equal to 500,000 pounds of dualin or 3,250,000 pounds of gunpowder in explosive force, a daily amount of 333 pounds of nitroglycerin or 4,333 pounds of gunpowder for 750 days. The record for 2,720 pounds of candles used in one heading of the Hoosac Tunnel during a period of seven months, from April 1 to November 1 of 1865,[19]) gives a basis for the amounts used in the eight headings of Big Bend during two years and a half, a total of more than 87,000 pounds, a daily consumption of more than 115 pounds.

That nitroglycerin, dualin, and gunpowder were all three used in Big Bend is quite certain. They were used together on the road for blasting in other tunnels. Drinker gives "powder, trinitroglycerine, and dualin employed" at Lewis Tunnel and "nitro-glycerine and powder employed for blasting" at Stretcher's Neck.[20]) There seems to be no basis for the relative quantities of these explosives used in Big Bend Tunnel. That candles were the main source of light in Big Bend is very improbable. Like hand drills, "lard oil and blackstrap" are too well connected with the tunnel to be only incidental to its construction. Any concession, however, in quantity or quality of materials for lighting added to the darkness or to the general foulness of the place, and possibly to both.

In Big Bend Tunnel the vitiated air, from unusual heat, blasting, burning blackstrap, and from other sources, became a serious problem for the engineers of that work and delayed the drilling there "considerably",[21]) a situation to say the least very harmful to the laborers and may have resulted in heavy casualties.

Blasting was the second great danger to life in Big Bend Tunnel. The employment of explosives, even where the greatest care is exercised in handling them, rarely fails to take its toll. The press records of the second half of the 19th century for users of blasting agents are not unlike those of the first quarter of the 20th for aviators. Gunpowder, mica powder, dualin, dynamite--all have their records.

The most dangerous explosive used in tunnels during the period was nitroglycerin, so dangerous in its liquid state that the Nitroglycerin Act was passed in 1869, by which "act the use of nitroglycerine *per se* was absolutely prohibited, but power was reserved to the Secretary of State specially to license any substance having nitro-glycerine, in any form, as one of its component parts."[22]) As

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[18]) Tunnelling, p. 244.
[19]) Ibid., p. 237.
[20]) Ibid., p. 965.
[21]) Greenbrier Independent, June 1, 1872.
[22]) The Library Magazine, I (1883), 410.

late as 1871 the editors of the Scientific American were hammering against the general and indiscriminate use of nitroglycerin in the United States, and added that its "black record will keep increasing so long as nitro-glycerin is used as a blasting agent."[23]) Alfred Bernhard Nobel, Swedish manufacturer of explosives and philanthropist, invented dynamite in his factory at Glasgow, Scotland, in the late sixties, by way of escape from the unavoidable contingencies upon the indiscriminate use of the liquid material, particularly from the results of its poisonous character through actual contact with the substance and from the danger of its "liability to percolate through fissures in the rock, and to give rise to subsequent accidents when the escaped liquid was struck by a pick, perhaps at a considerable distance from the original hole."[24]) To avoid these objections to the use of nitroglycerin, the substance was supplied in a frozen form for the miners at Hoosac Tunnel, by G. M. Mowbray, an experienced chemist, who manufactured the explosive at the tunnel.[25]) That such precautions were taken against the dangers of nitroglycerin in the hands of Negroes "much crowded together" in Big Bend Tunnel and elsewhere on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad seems to lack support from the records of that work.

Falls of rock present a third great danger to laborers in building tunnels. Falls in the tunnels on the Cincinnati and Southern were very heavy, from seven tunnels on the line amounting to 8,763 cubic yards.[26]) Board Tree Tunnel on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in West Virginia is notable in that respect. "The treacherous character of the roof of this tunnel led to many accidents from falls ... cost many lives, and maimed many of the men. These casualties seemed confined more particularly to the miners and laborers."[27]) In this connection one of the reasons given for the expensiveness of the work on the tunnels of that road in West Virginia was the "difficulty of maintaining a supply of suitable skilled labor in the face of the perpetual risk of life and limb."

That Big Bend was equally dangerous, if not more so, can be readily shown. The tunnel was constructed through "hard red shale crumbling on exposure".[28]) A local newspaper states: "On last Saturday morning there was a great slide in the West Portal of the Great Bend Tunnel. The slide is estimated at 8,000 cubic yards."[29]) The treacherousness of its roof is noted in another report soon after trains began to pass through Big Bend. "The cars run slowly through the tunnel, as rock is constantly falling from the unfinished portion, and a few days ago the timbers fell in with such force as to destroy

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[23]) Scientific American, XXIV (Jan. 14, 1871), 36.
[24]) The Library Magazine, I, 410 ff.
[25]) Ibid., I, 412. Journal of the Franklin Institute, XCI, 148.
[26]) Tunnelling, p. 966.
[27]) Ibid., p. 958.
[28]) Ibid., p. 965.
[29]) Greenbrier Independent, June 1, 1872.

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the rails."[30]) The failure of the timber arch to hold up the roof of the tunnel was the reason for replacing it with a brick arch, beginning in the eighties.[31])

In addition to tunnel-sickness, blasting, and falls of rock, many other dangers faced the steel-driver at Big Bend. A local newspaper on one occasion mentions that "two negro men were found dead in the woods near that place ... Greenbrier seems to be full of dead negroes. They are doubtless men who having been paid off by the C. and O. R. R. are murdered by their companions, on their way home, to secure their money."[32]) The steel-driver might have been killed in pursuit of his white woman in the neighborhood, by getting stabbed in a fight, or possibly in a "drunken brawl" at the tunnel.

Although liquor was supposed to be prohibited by contract around the tunnels on the Chesapeake and Ohio,[33]) its free use at Big Bend added to the unfavorable circumstances there for safety. Gilpin says that he dipped the liquor for the steel-drivers when they opened the tunnel from east end to shaft one, and Jenkins says that Captain Johnson gave a barrel of liquor when they knocked through the heading from shafts two to three. On the occasion Gilpin mentions "several parties were severely stabbed",[34]) and one might infer that the "parties" were intoxicated from something. The occasion Jenkins mentions gains favor from "Number two" of "Big Bend Times". Jeff Washington says that "every bunch of grass in the neighborhood had a bottle in it".[35]) When the "headings between shaft one and two were driven together ... all parties repaired to head quarters where a barrel of old Burbon whiskey, was rolled out and a general jollification ensued ... Though a few knives and pistols, boney fists and strong sinewy arms were flourished we have no casualties to report."[36])

Liquor among these ignorant Negroes "much crowded together" in Big Bend enhanced the dangers to life there, and rendered them much more likely victims of the unexpected explosions in the tunnel and the threatening rock above their heads. Americans, white and black, handle themselves with abandon in such an environment, and yet "no casualties to report" characterizes the press accounts of the laborers at Big Bend from first to last. I have failed to find a record of a single death inside the tunnel.

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[30]) Railroad Gazette, Nov. 2, 1872.

[31]) J. P. Nelson, in The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, p. 27, says of Big Bend: "The rock formation is very hard, but disintegrates under the weather, so much so that at the time of the construction of the brick arch, large cavities, sometimes fifty feet deep, were found above the timber arch." Judge Miller, who lived a long life in the larger Big Bend neighborhood, calls the tunnel a "death-trap". J. H. Miller. History of Summers County, p. 487.

[32]) John Henry, p. 30.

[33]) Tunnelling, "Appendix", I, X.

[34]) P. 53.

[35]) P. 73.

[36]) John Henry, p. 30.

The press of Virginia and West Virginia, which apparently remained silent on casualties in the tunnels of the New River region, was able to give startling numbers of deaths from the construction of tunnels farther away. A local newspaper, published on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad in West Virginia, carried the casualty list for the Hoosac: "a hundred and thirty-six men have been killed by casualties in the course of construction of the tunnel." [37]) Another newspaper of the state has the following to say of deaths at Mt. Cenis Tunnel: "It has been told that more than 1,000 workmen have lost their lives up to 1870; but the guides and directors declare that not more than fifty or sixty had been killed outright, though a number of others had been seriously wounded ... It is not improbable ... that ... at least 1,000 men have lost their lives." [38]) The Scientific American gives a similar list of deaths for Mt. Cenis: "Many lives have necessarily been lost during this great work, but far less than one would suppose; probably from 600 to 800 in all, so far as we have heard from time to time." [39]) After making an examination of "government statistics", a more recent writer says, "We kill in our coal mines more than three times as many per thousand employed as are killed in France or Belgium, and nearly three times as many as are killed in Great Britain ... in spite of the fact that the coal mines of the United States may be more easily worked and with less danger than those of any other coal-producing country in the world." [40])

That dangers to life in any European tunnel or coal mine per square inch were greater than those in Big Bend would be hard to show. That a heavy casualty list belongs to the construction of the tunnel seems most certain. It follows that John Henry had about an equal break at Big Bend, and might have died there from disease, from falls in the heading, or from one of a dozen other dangers, with the strong probability that the account of his end from any of these causes would have been confused with that of his drilling-contest in common report. If he was actually killed in the tunnel, and if his death seemed to threaten the morale of his gang, and eventually that of others, almost a certain consequence of the event, the management in all probability encouraged such a consummation by way of diverting the attention of the community from the tragic possibilities of the place. Henry's death in this way would more likely have occurred about the time the tunnel was completed. The dangers from foul air and blasting increased porportionately as the work progressed farther and farther from the shafts, and from the ends of the tunnel. The dangers from falls in the heading became greater and greater as the "hard red shale crumbling on exposure" had time for disintegration. Death of the steel-driver at this time from any of the tunnel dangers

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[37]) Kanawha Chronicle, Dec. 17, 1873.
[38]) Wheeling Intelligencer, Dec. 30, 1870.
[39]) XXIV, 55.
[40]) Letters from a Workingman (1908), by An American Mechanic, p. 153 ff.

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would satisfy the belief of Miller and Gilpin, two of the important witnesses for his presence at the tunnel, and would not be in conflict with the actual knowledge of either of the other three witnesses, Jenkins and the Hedrick brothers. His end in the tunnel would satisfy the local fear of his ghost, and the confusion of the event with that of the drilling-contest in common report would satisfy popular belief in his death as a result of the contest.

The recent report, before the Interstate Commerce Commission,[41]) of the original cost of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, with its antecedents and subsidiaries, failed to take into account the waste of man power in building the road, and may be regarded as an official expression on the question of deaths at Big Bend. John Hedrick, who had some responsibility in building the tunnel, is quite certain that nobody was killed there, and insists that John Henry "went away somewhere". While the construction of Big Bend Tunnel without a casualty list can be explained only as a miraculous performance, the possibility that Henry left the tunnel at some time subsequent to his drilling-contest may be considered.

Following his trail from that locality, however, seems hardly possible, and actually finding him at best not unlike drawing a "perfect hand" in bridge, an enormous uncertainty for the individual player. The problem would be sufficiently challenging if there were only one John Henry, and he a man of highly domestic habits. Instead, the country is full of men named John Henry, actual and alleged, and they have travelled everywhere, as the second chapter of this study indicates.[42]) Many of the laborers on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad in West Virginia were Virginia Negroes, and possibly the steel-driver came from that state.

F. R. Pyle, contractor of Huntington, West Virginia, reports his aunt, widow of Contractor McIntyre who had a hand in building the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, as "confident that there was such a negro at the tunnel, but that his name was John Henry Hardy." He adds: "A man by the name of Banks whose father was a foreman at the tunnel says that the negro was born at Winchester, Virginia, on the Henry plantation, passed to a man by the name of Hardy who married in the Henry family, and that he was an illegitimate child, and sometimes gave his name as Williamson--not Williams." J. A. Williams, Negro of Lynchburg, Virginia, "knew all the construction gangs in the South a quarter of a century ago, and back", and has this to say about Henry:

> The steel-driver's name was John Henry Mundy, of Louisa County, Virginia. He has several relatives about there now. His pal was Lewis Thursty, and he had a brother named Bob Thursty, from near Knoxville, Tennessee, or from Alabama.
>
> Henry was large frame man, and light red color. He died in Kentucky, on Big Sandy Railroad, or L and N.

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[41]) Valuation Dockets 457 and 477.
[42]) Cf. John Henry, p. 12 ff.

I expected some trouble with Henry's irregular family connections at Winchester, but the "several relatives" in Louisa County should know something about him. Their complete silence, however, is not unlike that of his several relatives in Henry County of the same state where he is supposed to be John Henry Martin. Henry's relation to Hardy, Mundy, and Martin may develop into something eventually, but at present it seems rather dubious. He is sufficiently difficult without such relationships.

An example of what one may expect to find on the trail of John Henry can be shown from investigations in Norfolk, Virginia. Three Negroes with the hero's name were mentioned as being there at some time during the construction of Big Bend Tunnel. The Federal Census report of 1870 for that city gives the name of a Negro boy John Henry, fifteen years old. The local newspaper mentions a John Henry on two different occasions. On the former, "John Henry, negro seaman on the brig S. P. Brown, charged with mutiny, was turned over to his captain."[43]) On the latter, "John Henry, negro, was arrested late Tuesday evening upon complaint of another negro named Frank Allen, who charged him with stealing a boat belonging to him. Henry denied the theft, and alleged that he borrowed the boat from another man. During the night he attempted to break out of the watch house. He tore off one of the planks in the bunk, and with it endeavored to force the iron bars across the window, but without success."[44]) The city directory of Norfolk and Portsmouth for 1900 contains the name of one Negro John Henry, and for 1920 two Negroes named John Henry. Living in Norfolk-Portsmouth in 1927 were two Negroes by the name of John Henry, one from North Carolina and one from South Carolina, and a third by the name of Jack Henry, from King William County, Virginia. They were all three heads of families, and claimed no kinship with each other.

Mention of nine by the name of John Henry indicates the possibility of a much larger number in that locality during the period. In the summer of 1927, I got on the trail there of an old Negro named John Henry, famed for his prowess in breaking "old iron" for the "junk houses" on Water Street. I soon found that this John Henry was confused with two other old Negroes by the same name in that immediate section. One of them had distinguished himself as a watermelon-catcher in unloading boats at the docks just below Water Street. The other was a rival in breaking old iron on Water Street, for T. M. Cashin, N. Block and Company, and the Eagle Iron Works, and for M. T. Cashin at the foot of Roanoke Dock, near Water Street. The two old iron-breakers were known by the people they worked for, and those they worked with, by various names, such as "Old Henry", "Big Henry", "Black Henry", and "John Henry", and occasionally by other names to distinguish one from the other.

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[43]) The Norfolk Virginian, Nov. 3, 1870.
[44]) Ibid., June 29, 1871.

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Charlie Shaw, who appeared to be an important man in M. T. Cashin's junk yard, made a typical report of the two men:

There were two old men around here who used to break up old iron. Both of them were real black men. I call one of them Daddy, and it hasn't been so long since he worked for us. His name was Robinson, but I don't know the rest of it. I think he lived over in Berkley. I called him Daddy and the other fellow John Henry, but he was bigger than John Henry. He'd weigh 270 pounds and John Henry about 200.

John Henry has been dead 12 or 15 years. He was just naturally a better man than anybody I know of. He could do more work, and do it easier.

We used to give him a job breaking up old iron, and he'd go out and look it over and sit there and think about it, and then go home sometimes and not do a lick of work that day. Next morning early he'd go at it, and have it done and be sitting down looking at it as pleased before you'd think he'd hardly begun. He'd look and plan, and he didn't lose any licks.

I have seen him break iron 12 inches thick. He'd knock big wheels and anchors all to pieces. He could break more iron in two hours than anybody else in a day. He worked by the job or by the ton, and I never knowed him to do any other sort of work.

He'd always sing about the steel-driver John Henry when he was breaking iron. He was called Old Henry, Big Henry, or Black Henry, as well as John Henry, and he said he'd been everywhere.

I don't know anything about him when he wasn't around here. He'd come around about once a month to see if he could get a job.

Daddy has left town and gone out in the country to live, and I don't know where he is. John Henry was 45 or 50 when he died. I don't know where he died, but somewhere in town here. He died from drinking too much liquor.

Mr. Shaw displayed the hammers or sledges these iron-breakers used when they were working for M. T. Cashin. Daddy's was a twenty-pound sledge, with a four-foot handle; and Henry's a thirty-pound sledge, with a three-foot handle. T. M. Cashin displayed a seventy-pound sledge, with a three-foot handle, which he claims John Henry used to break old iron for him; but T. M. Cashin, like several others on Water Street, did not distinguish between the two old Negroes in his references to John Henry.

While the Negro Mr. Shaw characterizes as John Henry is not altogether unlike the steel-driver of Big Bend fame, his age and his singing of the "steel-driver John Henry" seem to bar his identification as the original John Henry. When Mr. Shaw made his report, in 1927, he was quite certain that the iron-breaker was not more than fifty years of age at the time of his death.

The trail of the steel-driver leads to another example at first of greater promise, but ultimately of greater disappointment. In February, 1929, J. S. Barker[46]) "investigated pretty thoroughly among

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[46]) St. Albans, W. Va.

the older employees of the Chesapeake and Ohio" who were then living in St. Albans, West Virginia, "to ascertain the reality of a John Henry". Mr. Barker writes:

There is a Jeff Washington here now who is quite a personage in connection with early employees of the C. and O. Ry. Jeff left his home near Charlottesville at the age of 18 years and, together with John Henry who was a few years his senior, employed themselves to a C. and O. contractor, a Mr. Johnson, who was clearing away the timber from the proposed right-of-way at White Sulphur Springs, W. Va.

This was about 1868, and Jeff continued without break or blemish in the employ of the C. and O. for 50 years. He is now on the retired list of the C. and O. at a comfortable salary ...

Jeff said that John Henry lived at the little town of Keswick just east of Charlottesville and has a sister who now lives in Charlottesville. He also says that there was a John Hardy who worked with them in the Big Bend tunnel. John Hardy died while they worked at the Big Bend, and John Henry died while they worked at the Lewis Tunnel.

In my conversation with Capt. Mallory, who also worked for the C. & O. then and until he reached his retiring age, said that while he could not positively identify John Henry as having worked at this particular place and time, he recalled having heard his men, who worked under him, sing that song, 'You killed John Henry, but you won't kill me.'

The Captain also recalled that it was here at these places where the Burley Diamond Drill was first used and with steam power.

The story as related to me by Frank Crosby was that this man John Henry and his helper had become expert with the hammer and drill, and they challenged the steam driller for a contest hole, in which John Henry and his helper won out, but John Henry lost his life. John Henry was six feet tall, yellow, and powerful physically.

Some time ago the Charleston Daily Mail, in one of its Sunday issues, in an article on the early history of W. Va. denied that there really was a John Henry who had worked for the C & O at the Big Bend tunnel.

Jeff Washington and Frank Cosby, both of whom worked for the C & O in the Big Bend at the time of its construction, say that there was a John Henry.

About two months after getting this report, I visited Jeff Washington at his home, a very old man whose mind seemed to "come and go". Occasionally he was seemingly reticent about Big Bend affairs, but for the most part talked rather freely, and at times rather inconsistently. He remembered the tunnel as a good place to save money because there was nothing in the neighborhood to spend it for, but later stated that the younger men, including himself, wasted all the money they got there, and added that "every bunch of grass in the neighborhood had a bottle in it."

He repeated the story of his going with John Henry from Keswick, near Charlottesville, Virginia, to work on the Chesapeake and Ohio in West Virginia. He said that he and Henry first worked "bushing" on the road near White Sulphur Springs, then in Lewis Tunnel near

there, and eventually went farther west to work on Big Bend, that Henry kept a piece of ribbon tied on the handle of his hammer, and that nobody could get it off. He described Henry as not real black, of average height, and weight about 160 pounds. He said that he did not see a steam drill on the road, and that he knew nothing of Henry's drilling-contest. He was certain that he knew nothing of the death of the steel-driver at Big Bend, and that he has not seen Henry or heard anything from him since they were together in the tunnel. He remembered hearing at Big Bend about the time it was completed that Henry had been killed there and his body thrown into the big fill. He seemed very anxious to be reported as not believing the story of Henry's burial. Yet he explained that a "great many were killed in the tunnel and buried anywhere around there."

Jeff Washington made no reference to John Hardy in giving this account of John Henry. Then I inquired of his acquaintance with Hardy at Big Bend. He answered that he had never seen Hardy on the road or elsewhere, but that he had heard of him. Later, however, he used the name Hardy two or three times for that of Henry in speaking of the steel-driver, seemingly a clear case of confusing the two names after Hardy had been mentioned. He recalled having heard of the article which Mr. Barker read in the Charleston Daily Mail, and which on the authority of hearsay had substituted the name John Hardy for that of John Henry as the famous steel-driver at Big Bend Tunnel. In all probability the name Hardy was brought into the conversation Mr. Barker had with Jeff Washington soon after the article appeared, resulting in the incorrect report the former made from the latter of Henry's and Hardy's death.

While John Henry seems not to have a sister living in Charlottesville, Jeff Washington's account of Henry's connections there offers something definite for further inquiries. There are three Negro families by the name of Henry in the section, with five members named John Henry: one family with three now living who are descendants of Adam Henry, a slave of Garrett White, of North Garden, ten miles from Charlottesville; another family with two, father and son, who were slaves of Professor John Staige Davis, of the University of Virginia. The first three were not old enough to help build the Chesapeake and Ohio across West Virginia. The other two were fifty-five and thirty-one respectively when the road was begun in 1870.

Charles James,[46]) of Keswick, who talked volumes about slavery and Civil War times, says:

Noah Reasby and John Henry were friends in tunnels and other work. Noah Reasby drove steel last in the Catskill Mountains to bring water into New York City.

I had a niece and uncle who lived at Whitehall, New York State, and my niece owned a place right where the water tunnel was made, and she was paid and water put in her house. Uncle lived in Whitehall, and was a blacksmith.

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[46]) Testimony obtained in Aug., 1929.

Uncle was named John Henry after his father who was John Henry. His mother was named Judy Henry. She had one son named Charles James, and he was my father, and then she married John Henry and had a son John Henry. Uncle John Henry was bound to Professor Davis in the University of Virginia, and his mother was too.

Uncle worked on the C and O Railroad, and I did too, when they were building it, a long time before he went to Whitehall. He was at Big Bend Tunnel, but he won't the great steel-driver there. That John Henry got killed. I didn't see him when I was there, but Dick Morris and Noah Reasby did. They said that John Henry was a great steel-driver at Big Bend, and talked about him as long as they lived. They both died about ten years ago here near Keswick.

Although Mr. James was certain that his Uncle John Henry was not the great steel-driver at Big Bend, the statement that he worked on the Chesapeake and Ohio in West Virginia made an investigation at Whitehall necessary, and a letter to Mr. H. E. Sullivan, of the Historical Society of Whitehall, brought the following answer:

This day I interviewed the daughters of John L. Henry and found as follows:

The head of the family never came to Whitehall, but his wife Judy visited here about 1870 for six weeks. Judy was married twice. By first husband she had a son Charles James and three daughters. By the second she had John Lewis Henry and William, who lived at Charlottesville, Va...

John L. Henry, son of John and Judy, was born in east room of U. Va. Aug. 15, 1839 and. d. at Whitehall June 24, 1911. He learned the blacksmith trade and is said to have worked in a Confederate arsenal. Later he became the body servant of Lieut. Wm. Boyd of this town who brought him to Whitehall on his return in 1865. He worked at his trade here from 1867 until his death and was considered the best in town. I knew him well. He always shod our horses and did any other work in his line which we had. He was, with his family, a member of the Methodist Church and was a good man in every way and was highly respected.

May 18, 1867 he married Emma Baltimore, daughter of George and Jenett Jackson Baltimore, and they had the following children:

Marietta B.	b. May 17, 1868	
Julia	b. Nov. 26, 1870	d. June 10, 1880
Georgiana	b. Aug. 18, 1874	d. January 7, 1894
Isabella V.	b. Nov. 24, 1878	
Robert Lewis	b. Sept 17, 1880	d. March 30, 1882

Marietta (Matey) and Isabella (Belle) live in the family homestead, purchased 1867 ... Both are cripples ...

There is no large water system so far north ...

Mr. James says that his uncle was at Big Bend before going to New York, but Mr. Sullivan takes him out of the South five years before the tunnel was begun. Developments from trying to clear up this confusion by writing letters resulted in a trip to Whitehall in the spring of 1930 and a second to Keswick in the summer following.

It seemed important to determine whether this John Henry was actually in the South during the construction of the tunnel.

In Whitehall I failed to find anything of a documentary sort to show that he returned to Virginia after leaving in 1865. The family letters had been destroyed, and no newspaper files for the period seem to exist. His two daughters, Matey and Belle, were certain that he did not return after his trip north with Boyd, and their neighbors, those around sixty or seventy years of age, agreed, with varying degrees of sureness, that he could not have been at Big Bend Tunnel. However, Joseph Chapelle and George Brown, older residents of Whitehall, claimed that they knew him well, and thought it quite probable that he returned to the South to work on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, at least during winter - - - about half of the year at Whitehall in the seventies,[47]) - - - in his greater effort to pay for the home he had recently bought. Mr. Chapelle worked around 1870 for the National Transportation Line, on the canal through Whitehall. He said that Henry shod mules for the same company at the time, and that activities were suspended there during winter. He said that Henry's shop was often closed in winter around 1870, but failed to remember how long it stayed closed. He was not certain that it was always open in the summer, and knew that the company's mules were shod at other shops as well as at Henry's.

Nobody in Whitehall seemed to know a great deal about Henry, not even his two daughters. They knew that he had received hard treatment from being bound out as a slave, but they knew nothing of the circumstances. They knew that he had some trouble with his back, and that their mother "rubbed it". A large number of men there, who as boys had "brushed flies" for Henry while he was shoeing horses, remembered that he had trouble with his back. Some of them thought that marks on his shoulders and back were callouses from wearing a yoke to pull a plow or to carry water when he was bound out, and others were quite sure that the marks were only prominent muscles. They had seen Henry working in the shop with his shirt open and his sleeves up, and all agreed that he was a very strong man. That he had lifted a mule on his shoulder on one occasion was a matter of common report. Mr. Sullivan thought, perhaps, while Henry was very reticent about his early life, and all of his particularly intimate affairs, that he talked somewhat freely with two old "rounders" with whom he associated a great deal before becoming a member of the church. But these two men are gone from Whitehall.

Such closeness on the part of Henry to old "rounders" would seem to upset Mr. Sullivan's earlier statement that he was a "good man in every way", but this report was based on the later years of Henry's life. Nobody in Whitehall, of course, reported Henry as a bad man at any period of his career. He was known to play cards

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[47]) Mr. Brown says that he worked only six months a year at that time, and lived through the winter on his savings from the summer.

and drink occasionally, but never seen gambling or drunk; and on occasion to forget his domestic obligations, but not in any way that would characterize him as lacking real manliness. His associates were largely white people, and they held him in high esteem from the time of his arrival in Whitehall. He was "never ugly or boisterous", and after joining the church he always spoke of the devil as "Mr. Satan". He had "good manners", although he never learned to write, and his letters were always written by some member of his family.

Henry was in the habit of singing as he worked in the shop such songs as "Old Black Joe" and "Shoo Fly". He often chanted "tunes" to his hammer and anvil, and was greatly attached to them.

His younger daughter remembered that he spoke of working on the railroad at some time, but knew nothing definite about the matter, but they both insisted that he did not work on any road in the South after going to Whitehall in 1865. The older was less than two years of age when Big Bend Tunnel was begun, and the younger was born six years after its completion. The former can not be considered an authority on the activities of her father while she was only two or three years old, and hardly better than the latter who can report only hearsay for the early seventies. Their lack of definite knowledge, even from hearsay reports in the family, of their father during the seventies and eighties, as well as his earlier life, no doubt because of his reticence about such matters, makes possible his consideration as the original John Henry. Several definite connections seem to exist between the two.

Of his four daughters, the second was named Julia, born about eight months after W. R. Johnson got the contract for the construction of Big Bend Tunnel, and the third was named Georgiana, born about two years after the tunnel was built. In about half of the texts of the ballad, "Julia Ann" appears as the steel-driver's wife, woman, or baby. The "white house", from which the steel-driver is taken to the tunnel to drive and to which after the contest he is taken injured or dead, may be a variation of Whitehall, the home of John L. Henry at the time. Moreover, his singing "Shoo Fly" and other tunes as he worked in his shop, his attachment to his hammer and anvil, his "good manners", association with white people, superior strength, lack of ability to write, - - all are in keeping with the direct and popular reports for the original John Henry, who sang "Shoo Fly" at Big Bend, associated with white people, and got the Gilpin family to write letters for him to his family in North Carolina, possibly a confusion with New York. He required "good manners" for his contacts at the tunnel, as Mr. Gilpin represents him, and something of the sort, echoed in the Henry tradition, almost certainly contributed to the belief in the great steel-driver as a good man, not infrequently too good for anything of consequence. Doubtlessly such apparent connections would be sufficient for the identification of Chaucer's Wife of Bath.

When Big Bend was begun in 1870, John L. Henry was thirty-one years old, weight around 170 pounds, height about five feet eight

inches, and almost black. At his home I was able to get a photograph, made about 1870, of him in his "Sunday clothes", and presented a copy of it to Mr. Gilpin and the Hedrick brothers for their judgement of him as the steel-driver. After careful examination they agreed that it was not altogether unlike the Negro they knew at the tunnel, but only his face and hands were exposed in the photograph, and they remembered him most distinctly as a man of energy, a man of action, with full chest and muscled arms and shoulders. Besides, he was not quite tall enough for Mr. Gilpin and George Hedrick, and slightly too stout for John Hedrick. The writer then sought the opinion of Jeff Washington, who gave it with little more than a glance at the photograph. The feet seemed to amuse him, and yet they are very good Negro feet, as good or better than Jeff's own. Nevertheless, he was certain that they were not the feet of the John Henry he knew on the Chesapeake and Ohio.

The identification, therefore, of John L. Henry as the steel-driver would no longer seem possible, although his trail promised a great deal. The wise thing, perhaps, for the investigator was to accept from the first the report of Charles James, that his uncle was not the man; but the existence of the criminal element in the Henry tradition led to the suspicion that the whole story had not been told. The failure of Mr. James to remember a proper amount of detail about the career of his uncle, along with his history in full of the Civil War, added weight in that direction. But this trail, like that followed earlier at Norfolk, leads only to disappointment; and the testimony of Charles James for the steel-driver may be placed among the popular reports of the second chapter of this study, and, after a necessary explanation, that of Jeff Washington may be placed among the direct testimony of the third chapter.

Not a little chagrined at the failure of Jeff Washington to consider the photograph in a more serious manner, I took pains to remind him that John L. Henry seemed to be the only member of the Henry families around Keswick, or in the larger Charlottesville district, who could qualify as the steel-driver, and that he did not have a sister there or elsewhere. Jeff continued his good-natured attitude, and readily shifted ground in two important particulars. Instead of repeating his earlier report of first coming in contact with John Henry at Keswick, a depot on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad about ten miles east of Charlottesville, he stated that he first knew the steel-driver at Ivy, a depot on the same road about ten miles west of Charlottesville. He explained that Henry's sister lived, not in Charlottesville, but "back on the ridge of the mountains above Hinton," West Virginia. While the first shift may have no positive value, the second is highly significant, in that Jeff placed the sister in the immediate section where the steel-driver's white woman lived, according to Miller, Scott, and Gilpin. At the time the tunnel was built this section was not a Negro community, and in all probability not a Negro there. Henry's sister and Henry's white woman, then, are one and the same, and Jeff told more than he meant to. His amusement,

therefore, at my failure to find Henry's sister in Charlottesville seems obvious.

The trails of John Henry have brought unsatisfactory results, and the question of what became of him is still not answered. His leaving the Big Bend neighborhood was certainly not to the tune of a brass band, and it is very doubtful that he left at all. He had about an equal chance to go or stay. The fear of his ghost in the tunnel and the wide popular belief in his death there, where escape at best was only a gambling possibility, may be regarded as lending some value to the ballad record of the event. Fortunately, a full account of the career of John Henry is not necessary for an answer to the question of his existence and the reality of his drilling-contest.

John Raybern Zierold

THE JOHN HENRY HAMMER SONG

A

Mrs. Sidney Wilson, Minnehaha Springs, W. Va. Mrs. Wilson obtained this version from her brother, a man well acquainted with construction camps in the South.

This old hammer, - - huh,
Killed John Henry, - - huh;
This old hammer, - - huh,
Killed John Henry, - - huh;
This old hammer, - - huh,
Killed John Henry, - - huh;
Killed him dead, - - huh.

Ain't no hammer, - - huh,
In these mountains, - - huh;
Ain't no hammer, - - huh,
In these mountains, - - huh;
Ain't no hammer, - - huh,
In these mountains, - - huh;
Rings like mine, - - huh.

Take this hammer, - - huh,
And give it to the walker, - - huh;
Take this hammer, - - huh,
And give it to the walker, - - huh;
Take this hammer, - - huh,
And give it to the walker, - - huh;
For I'm goin' home, - - huh.

I told Hattie, - - huh,
To whip - a those children, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To whip - a those children, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To whip - a those children, - - huh;
Make 'em mind, - - huh.

'Cause the penitentiary, - - huh,
Is full o' people, - - huh;
'Cause the penitentiary, - - huh,
Is full o' people, - - huh;
'Cause the penitentiary, - - huh,
Is full o' people, - - huh;
Won't raised right, - - huh.

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I told Hattie, - - huh,
To make her dress a little longer, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To make her dress a little longer, - - huh;
I told Hattie, - - huh,
To make her dress a little longer, - - huh;
A - showin' of her laig, - - huh.

B

Newton Redwine. Mr. Redwine says: "John Henry had no regular song to sing as he worked, but it seems that the following was his favorite just before his death." The Beattyville Enterprise, Beattyville, Ky., Feb. 1, 1929.

I have hammered
Four long years
With this old hammer

I have hammered
On the W & A
I have hammered
On the old M & C
I have worked
On the C & S

The hammer am a ringin'
And the steel am a singin'
I'll put the hole
On down boys
Put the hole on down

This old hammer
Killed John Scott
It will never kill me

Hammer am a ringin'
Steel am a singin'
I'll put the hole
On down boys
I'll put the hole
On down - hut - hut - hut

Hut - hut - hut
I'll put the hole on down
I'll put the hole on down

This old hammer
Has killed John Scott
It will never kill me
Hut - hut - hut

I'll put the hole on down, boys
I'll put the hole on down

C

Minnie Darby, Evington, Va.

This old hammer
Killed John Henry;
It won't kill me, boys,
It won't kill me.

I'm going back
To east Colorado;
I'm not coming back, boys,
I'm not coming back.

If that fast man
Asks for me, boys,
Tell him I'm gone,
Tell him I'm gone,

This old hammer
Killed John Henry;
It won't kill me, boys,
It won't kill me.

This old hammer
Ring a-like silver,
Shine a-like gold, boys,
Shine a-like gold.

I'm going home
To see my mama;
I'm not coming back, boys,
I'm not coming back.

If you see
My blue-eyed baby,
Tell her I'm gone, boys,
Tell her I'm gone.

This old hammer
Killed John Henry;
It won't kill me, boys,
It won't kill me.

D

Martin Barrow, of the Public Works Department of Jamaica, West Indies. Mr. Barrow sent this version of the song in Jamaica, July 26, 1932.

Ten pound hammer kill John Henry,
Ten pound hammer kill John Henry,
Ten pound hammer kill John Henry,
Somebody dying every day.

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Oh me pardner, oh me pardner,
Oh me pardner, oh me pardner,
Oh me pardner, oh me pardner,
Somebody dying every day.

I am sorry for me pardner,
I am sorry for me pardner,
I am sorry for me pardner,
Somebody dying every day.

I come wid Merican to put this tunnel through,
I come wid Merican to put this tunnel through,
I come wid Merican to put this tunnel through,
Somebody dying every day.

Number nine tunnel kill me pardner,
Number nine tunnel kill me pardner,
Number nine tunnel kill me pardner,
Somebody dying every day.

Number nine tunnel no will kill me,
Number nine tunnel no will kill me,
Number nine tunnel no will kill me,
Somebody dying every day.

Dis ole hammer it sound like diamon,
Dis ole hammer it sound like diamon,
Dis ole hammer it sound like diamon,
Somebody dying every day.

Ten pound hammer will never kill me,
Ten pound hammer will never kill me,
Ten pound hammer will never kill me,
Somebody dying every day.

Wake up, shake up, climb up Jacob ladder,
Wake up, shake up, climb up Jacob ladder,
Wake up, shake up, climb up Jacob ladder,
Somebody dying every day.

Rocks and mountain hang about me,
Rocks and mountain hang about me,
Rocks and mountain hang about me,
Somebody dying every day.

If I live to see December,
If I live to see December,
If I live to see December,
Somebody dying every day.

Take this hammer to the walker,
Take this hammer to the walker,
Take this hammer to the walker,
Somebody dying every day.

Tell him I am going buddy,
Tell him I am going buddy,
Tell him I am going buddy,
Somebody dying every day.

Going buddy to my country,
Going buddy to my country,
Going buddy to my country,
Somebody dying every day.

E

Aubrey F. Goff, Glenville, W. Va. Mr. Goff obtained the song in 1923, from the singing of Harley V. Townsend of Dusk, Gilmer County, W. Va. It is titled "The Yew Pine Mountains", and shows John Hardy as the victim of the hammer.

This old hammer rings like silver;
This old hammer rings like silver,
This old hammer rings like silver;
It shines like gold, babe, it shines like gold.
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.

This old hammer killed my buddy,
This old hammer killed my buddy;
This old hammer killed my buddy;
But it'll not kill me, babe, it'll not kill me.
Why! 'cause I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
Why! 'cause I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
Why! 'cause I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.

This old hammer killed John Hardy,
This old hammer killed John Hardy;
This old hammer killed John Hardy;
But it'll not kill me, babe, it'll not kill me.
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.

The people 'round here they don't like me,
The people 'round here they don't like me,
The people 'round here they don't like me;
But I don't care, babe, I don't care.
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.

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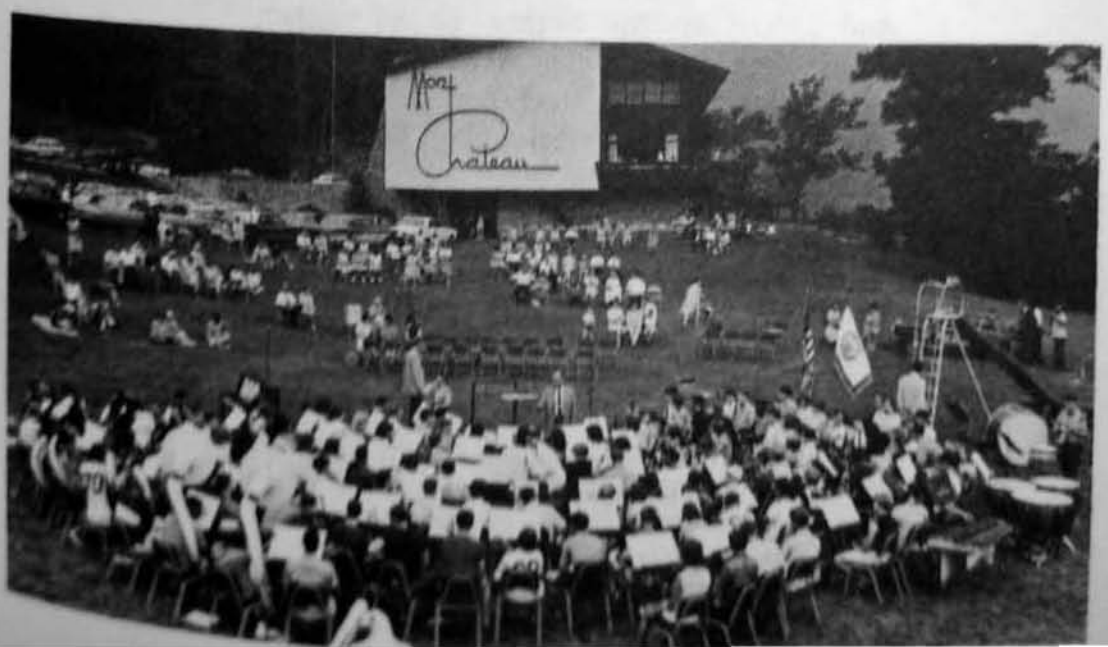
Forty - four days make forty - four dollars,
Forty - four days make forty - four dollars,
Forty - four days make forty - four dollars;
All in gold, babe, all in gold.
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.

I can hear my true love calling,
I can hear my true love calling,
I can hear my true love calling;
'Come back home, babe, come back home'.
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.

I can see my true love coming,
I can see my true love coming,
I can see my true love coming;
Dressed in red, babe, dressed in red.
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.

When I meet her I will greet her,
When I meet her I will greet her,
When I meet her I will greet her;
And she'll greet me, babe, and she'll greet me.
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains,
I'm going back to the Yew Pine Mountains;
That's my home, babe, that's my home.



VII

Burl McPeak, Fords Branch, Ky.

John Henry was a very small boy,
Sitting on his papa's knee;
He cried all out with a glad little shout,
'Big Bend tunnel on the C. and O. road
Going to be the death of me.'

John Henry left the white house,
Went out to the heading to drive.
The heading caught on fire with that light little blaze,
It was nothing but John Henry driving steel.

John Henry drove steel in the right-hand corner,
The steam drill in the left.
'Before I let the steam drill beat me down
I'll ham' my fool self to death,
I'll ham' my fool self to death.'

John Henry told his shaker,
'Shaker, you had better pray,
For if I miss this piece of steel
Tomorrow will be your burying day.'

John Henry had a pretty little woman,
Her name was Polly Ann.
John Henry lay sick and on his bed,
Polly Ann drove steel like a man.

The women all knew John Henry,
They knew he was so neat and so fine;
The Big Bend tunnel on the C and O road
Is the place where John Henry went blind,
Is the place where John Henry went blind,

John Henry was buried,
He was buried with each hammer in his hand.
It was written on his tomb just as solid as a doom,
'Here lies our steel-driving man.'

John Henry drove steel,
He drove from the top of his head.
Nine-pound hammer going up in each hand
Was what caused John Henry to fall dead,
Was what caused John Henry to fall dead.

VIII

Tishie Fitzwater, Hosterman, W. Va.

When John Henry was a little boy,
Sitting on his papa's knee,
He picked up a hammer and said to his papa,
'This is going to be the death of me.'

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John Henry was six foot tall,
And two foot and a half across the breast.
He would pound all day with a nine pound hammer
And never get tired and want to rest.

The scraper and the sprayers was all getting scared,
Thought the mountain was falling in,
When John Henry cried out with a loud shout,
'It is nothing but my hammer in the wind.'

John Henry had a little woman,
Her name was Polly Ann.
John Henry got sick and had to go to bed,
Polly drove steel like a man.

John Henry's mama come running
As hard as she could run:
'In the Big Ben tunnel on the C & O Road
Is going to be the death of my son.'

John Henry's wife,
He keeps her dressed up in blue.
She come running down stairs with her hair all curled,
And cried, 'O John Henry, I been true to you.'

IX

O. W. Evans, Editor of the New Castle Record, New Castle, Va. Mr. Evans wrote in 1928 that he heard the ballad forty years ago, and remembered some of it. "As I remember the negro banjo-pickers' melody of John Henry, they ended each verse with, 'And he died with his hammer in his hand.' "

The Cap'n he got oneasy (uneasy),
Thought Ben Tunnel was a-cavin' in,
But John Henry cried out with a loud, loud voice,
'It's nothin' but my hammer in the wind, God knows,
Nothin' but my hammer in the wind.'

Some said he come from Columbus,
Others said he come from Cain,
But he give in his name as an East Virginia man,
And he died with his hammer in his hand, God knows,
And he died with his hammer in his hand.

John Henry he had a woman,
She come all dressed in blue
. . . . . .
Sayin', 'Haven't I been true to you, God Knows,
Haven't I been true to you?'